

The fruit of the Spirit



Lionel Hartley



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Illustrations by Lionel Hartley

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Foreword

The Fruit of the Spirit is a series of ten sermons first presented by the author at a Surfer's Paradise Church once a month from February to November 2019.

This book contains an actual transcript of these sermons. The primary pericope (Scripture Reading)

for each one of these is the same: Galatians 5: 22, 23
“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” The final homily is a an application guide to the Fruit of the Spirit (Titled: The Fruit of the Spirit in Your Life and Mine) and the pericope also includes John 15:1-8.

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

John 15:2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

John 15:3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and

I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast

them into the fire, and they are burned.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

John 15:8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Scripture quotations are from the King James (Authorised) Version of the

Holy Bible unless otherwise referenced. It is the author's prayer that the reader will receive the same blessing that he received as he prepared these homilies.

Illustrations in the text have been referenced where a source is known.

As Christians, we are commanded to be led by the Spirit and "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Spiritual fruit is not to be

confused with spiritual gifts
(1 Corinthians 13:1,2; 14:1ff).

Being filled or led by the Spirit is not a Spiritual Gift, but rather it is how we live our lives as we follow Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is like the engine on a motor vehicle giving the vehicle power.

By inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives and giving Him the steering wheel, we can become propelled and

directed by love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, gentleness,
goodness, faith,
Meekness, temperance or
self-control (Galatians 5:22-
23), against such there is no
law.



The fruit of the Spirit is Love

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. Today's message is the first in a series on the fruit of the Spirit. And it will be a little

challenging in that the topic of love is so huge in Scripture and time forbids us all looking up every Bible verse that I will share.

Please don't get anxious if it seems that I am not giving you enough time to look up every verse, as more than likely we shan't, as we rush through an absolute mountain of treasures regarding love. But I will nevertheless reference everything that I

quote from the Bible for those who may choose to take notes.

The tasks we are entrusted with and enabled by the Spirit's power are referred to as Spiritual Gifts. This fruit is not a gift of the Spirit, but a gift from the Spirit.

This is worth remembering as the 14th Century writer Thomas À Kempis observed, "A wise lover values not so much the gift of the lover as

the love of the giver."

In the NT times The Greeks had a long affair with the concept of love; Greek philosophers had wrought their own fine distinctions between and among types of love-definitions that still inform philosophical and theological discussion today.

It may surprise you that, while we have only one word in English for love - no guessing that it is the word

'love' - the ancient Greeks had more than one. Any guessing as to how many?

The ancients had no less than TEN different words in use by the Greek speaking world for love. These were: *Eros, Epithumeo, Phileo, Ludus, Storge, Pragma, Mania, Cacoethes, Xenia and Agapao (or agape)*

'*Eros*' is a sensual, sexual love. Without eros, none of us would be here. This is where

is we get our English word 'erotic'. This word is not used in the New Testament, however it was used commonly in Greek literature of the time. Eros love is a sensual love, affecting all of the five senses. This is the love that moves people to write songs and poetry. This is the love that adds a spark to a marital relationship.

Eros can lure the most sensible person into doing the

most insensible things. In the Ancient Greek Platonic dialogues eros was a yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine.

In Greek mythology, Eros was the God of love. In most legends he was the son of Aphrodite and was represented as a winged youth armed with bow and arrows.

To the Romans he was Cupid, or Amor.

'Epithumeo' is to set your heart upon someone or something, to rightfully or otherwise long for, covet or passionately lust after someone or something.

Peter Gomes, Harvard Medical School chaplain, remembers that when his grandmother's doctor advised her to avoid temptation when it came to the foods she ate, she looked at him and said, "Better to die from having it

than to die from wanting it."

3. *Phileo* is a tender affection - such as toward a friend or family member. Think of Philadelphia: The city of brotherly love. *Phileo* creates friends who share each other's thoughts, feelings, plans and dreams.

It is the kind of bond that, even when good friends don't see each other for a long stretch, when they meet again it's as if they've never been

apart.

'*Ludus*' is a playful love. We get our word 'ludicrous' from this word.

'*Storge*' is a love that involves loyalty and an emotional bond between two people. Some might say that where Eros is exciting and stimulating, storge love is like a comfortable old shoe. It is the warm and affectionate love we feel within our immediate family.

It also shows up in one other context: it's the kind of love that soldiers in the same unit often come to have for each other.

'Pragma' is a take-it-or-leave-it love, a matter-of-fact love that is not challenging and may be dull and lacking excitement.

'Mania' is an irrational but irresistible desire of a belief or action.

'*Cacoethes*' is a loud, boisterous, evil, demonic self-seeking love.

'*Xenia*' is the Greek version of homely hospitality, and Zeus, the ruler of the Olympian gods, demanded the practice of *xenia* from all his mortal subjects - you were required to welcome the stranger at your door.

Psychiatrists call the aberrant version of this love '*Xenophilia*', which is having

an abnormal attraction or desire for anything strange or foreign. The opposite being xenophobia.

The noun '*Agapao*' and the verb form '*agape*' have three functions in Scripture: to describe firstly the attitude of God towards His Son, the human race generally, and to believers, secondly to convey God's will to His children concerning their attitude toward another and toward all

men and thirdly to express the essential nature of God.

Let's look to the Bible for an understanding of these three functions.

Firstly the attitude of God toward His Son. Read with me John 17:26 - "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

To understand the attitude of God toward the human race generally we look to John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And Romans 5:8 - "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

And to comprehend the attitude of God toward such as believe on the Lord Jesus, we look to John 14:21 - "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

One day, as a minister sat in the office of his church to meet anyone who might have

spiritual difficulties, only one person came. "What is your difficulty?" asked the minister. The man answered, "My difficulty is the ninth chapter of Romans, where it says, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.' "

"Yes," said the minister, "there is great difficulty in that verse; but which part of the verse is difficult for you?"

"The latter part, of course," said the man. "I cannot

understand why God should hate Esau."

The minister replied, "The verse has often been difficult, but my difficulty has always been with the first part of the verse. I never could understand how God could love that wily, deceitful, supplanting scoundrel Jacob."

And then to perceive how agapao can convey God's will to His children concerning their attitude toward another

and toward all men, we look
at 1 Thessalonians 3:12 -

"And the Lord make you to
increase and abound in love
one toward another, and
toward all men, even as we do
toward you:"

1 Corinthians 16:14 - "Let
all your things be done with
charity." The NIV reads, "Do
everything in love."

2 Peter 1:5-7 (This is
known by theologians as
Peter's Ladder.) "Add to your

faith virtue; and to virtue
knowledge; And to
knowledge temperance; and
to temperance patience; and
to patience godliness; And to
godliness brotherly kindness;
and to brotherly kindness
charity."

Remember I said that the
third function of *agapao* was
to express the essential nature
of God. We find this best
described by the disciple of
love, the beloved John. In his

epistles he mentions this several times but as an example we look to 1 John 4:8 - "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love."

A certain farmer had an unusual weathervane on his barn. Inscribed on the arrow were these words: "God is love." A passer-by turned in at the gate and asked the farmer, "What do you mean by that? Do you think God's love is

changeable; that it veers about as that arrow turns in the winds?" "Oh, no," replied the farmer, "I mean that whichever way the wind blows, God is still love."

So often Christians refer to this love as an unconditional love, which is probably a good summation of the Greek meaning. It is unnatural to us, because it is the very love of God Himself. The author Robert C. Shannon noted that

ordinary words were not enough to describe this kind of love. So they took an old word agape, that had fallen into disuse. They dusted it off and infused it with new meaning.

What is unconditional love?

It is silence - when your words would hurt; it is patience when your neighbours hurt.

It is deafness when a

scandal flows; it is
thoughtfulness for other's
woes.

It is promptness when stern
duty calls; it is courage when
misfortune falls.

It is trust when not
knowing the whys or hows; it
is acceptance of whatever
God allows.

It is no mistake that the list
of the fruit of the Spirit begins
with love. Unconditional love
is the very foundation of all

that we believe. In fact the list begins with love (fruit not fruits) and all that follows are simply descriptors of that love: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control".

1 John 4:7-8, 18 - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not

love does not know God, for God is love. ... We love Him because He first loved us.

Open your Bibles at 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 - If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love - I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to

remove mountains, but do not have love - I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love - I am nothing.

That was 1 Corinthians 13:3. In 1 Corinthians 3:13 Paul warns us that without this kind of love, all that we have done and accomplished will fall down like a house of cards. 1 Corinthians 3:13

reads, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

This love, *agape* love, is expressed in five ways.

Firstly *agape* love is expressed in salvation. John 3:16, say it with me, John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

That's *agapeo* expressed in salvation. Let's look at a couple of other examples:

Ephesians 1:4-5 Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him, in love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ

to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

1 Timothy 1:12-14 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the

faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

And Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, God has loved His

own for all eternity. Before time began He loved us and throughout all the ages to come without end He still will love us.

Secondly, *agape* love is expressed in action

Here is a summary of 1 Corinthians 13:4-10 and 13:

Love is patient, love is kind and not jealous; Love does not brag and is not arrogant, [love] does not act

unbecomingly; [love] does not seek its own, [love] is not provoked, [love] does not take into account a wrong suffered, [love] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails;

But -

If there are gifts of prophecy - they will be done

away; if there are tongues - they will cease; if there is knowledge - it will disappear.

For -

We know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. . . . But now faith, hope, love abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Another example of *agape* love expressed in action is

found in 1 John 5:1-3 -

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and who ever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

By this know that we love the children of God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Thirdly *agape* love is expressed in practice, as

serving God's purpose should be a joy for the believer - as an individual or corporately as a church.

Agape-filled children of God love to READ God's Word. 2 Timothy 2:15 - "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Agape-filled children of God love to HEAR God's

Word. 1 Peter 2:2 - "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (The word here for 'desire' means to long for or to crave.)

Agape-filled children of God love to SHARE God's Word - they love to help in God's work. Acts 16:10 - "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly

gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

And agape-filled children of God love to OBEY God's Word; for example, they love to attend God's house.

Hebrews 10:25 - "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Fourthly, *agape* love is expressed towards others. Unconditional love does not ask, "What's in it for me?" No, instead unconditional love asks, "What can I do to help?"

Romans 12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy.

Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbour.

Matthew 22:36-40 Teacher, which is the great

commandment in the Law?
And He said to Him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

And fifthly, *agape* love is expected. Christ, our Saviour,

Our Lord, Our King, has
commanded us to love
unconditionally - just as He
has unconditionally loved us.

John 13:34-35 A new
commandment I give to you,
that you love one another,
even as I have loved you, that
you also love one another. By
this all men will know that
you are my disciples, if you
have love for one another.

For a while, my wife
Rosemary and I lived in a tiny

two-roomed cottage at Bray Park in New South Wales. We noticed that a tree planted at the northern sunny end of the cottage had large and beautiful blossoms.

It was a feast to the eyes; but what an amazing difference in some of the branches trained round the corner of the house where they got much less sun.

This part of the building was shaded, not just by the

building itself but by a high dividing fence, less than a metre from the cottage. The leaves were starved and drooping, and with no blossoms in sight there was little promise of fruit.

They had the same root and stem in common, but while one part of the tree basked in the full glorious sunlight, the other branches were in the dismal shade.

Our character is affected in

the same way by an insufficient application of agapao love. The dark places produce unfruitful branches: strange weaknesses, distortions, immaturities, indirection, failures in practical life and conduct.

If we are to bear the fruit of the Spirit - that is all manner of precious fruit, each in its rightful season, we must trustfully and joyfully lay open our whole soul to the

full expanse of God's light shining in the face of Jesus Christ and daily invite the Spirit's presence in our lives.

While reading the writings of Dr Martin Luther King, I came across a passage on loving one's enemies. King recounted the following anecdote:

"Napoleon Bonaparte, the great military genius, looking back over his years of conquest is reported to have

said: 'Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have built great empires. But upon what did they depend? They depended on force. But centuries ago Jesus started an empire that was built on love...' And even to this day it is growing.

Back in April 1968 in Christchurch, New Zealand, my first ever published poem appeared in a popular magazine of the time, called

'Tiger's Journal'.

Here's how the poem went:

Once upon a time
Love was feeling poorly,
So he went to the Doctor
On Monday, bright and
early
To see what alchemy
would cure the pain
And light up the love in his
life again.

In order to have a healthy
love

A love that's warm and
close

The doctor prescribed the
giving of love

And if that doesn't work?
Double the dose.

As we close this first
homily of our series on the
fruit of the Spirit, let's
contemplate the words of the
Missionary Dr. Kenneth

Moyner.

According to John Stott in his "Vision for Holiness"

Moyner wrote,

"Joy is love exalting and peace is love at rest.

Patience, love enduring in every trial and test.

Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin.

Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within.

Faith is love's eyes opened, the loving Christ to see.

Meekness, love not
fighting but bowed at
Calvary.

Temperance, love in
harness and under Christ's
control.

The Christ is love in
person, and love, Christ in the
soul."

**A prayer: Thank you God
for your unconditional love
toward us. Thank you for
all the fruit your Spirit
freely gives us to both feast
upon and, more
importantly, to produce in
our lives. In Jesus' Name,
Amen.**



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The fruit of the Spirit is Joy

Reading from Galatians
5:22, 23 - “But the
fruit of the Spirit is
love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, gentleness,
goodness, faith, meekness,
temperance: against such
there is no law.”

Today’s homily is the

second that I have prepared in a series on the Fruit of the Spirit. Last time we looked at Love. Today we're looking at Joy – more specifically, a five-part plan for joy.

King David, after a lot of problems, difficulties, discouragements, and even some deaths, finally was bringing the ark, the visible presence of the great and mighty Lord, back. Back to his own people, back to

Israel, to the city of David – the new capital in Jerusalem.

In 1 Samuel Chapter 4. the Philistines and Israel met in battle, Israel lost, 30,000 men were killed, and the ark of the lord was captured.

It turned out, naturally, that God could take care of himself, so before 7 months had passed the Philistines had enough and were giving the ark back to Israel.

Turn with me to 2 Samuel
6:14-17.

2 Samuel 6:14-17 -

“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, 15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets. 16 As the ark of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal, daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when

she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

17 They brought the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord.

How do you think David felt? How is your life today? Do you identify with King David here? Do you feel like

jumping for joy? Do you feel like leaping with all your might? I remember that many years ago my daughter quoted a poem that went something like this: “Work like you don’t need the money, Love like you’ve never been hurt [and] Dance like nobody’s watching” (By the way you don’t need to dance to demonstrate that you are filled with joy.)

How do you think David

felt? Do you feel discouraged? Do you feel sad? Have the cares of life overwhelmed you, beaten you down?

If you had your choice, which way would you prefer to feel? Would you rather be sad or joyful?

We know an essential part of travelling, an essential part of not getting lost, is knowing where you are going. The same is true of life. If you

don't know where you are going, if you don't have a goal, you can be pretty sure you are not going to arrive at the right place.

Some Christians today don't know that joy can be a part of our goal. A certain popular magazine tells us that this whole idea of Christians celebrating was wrong. The magazine says that in view of the times we should be serious and sad as we

examine the sins in our life.

The nay-sayers, the doom
and gloom crowd are not
limited to our time.

Look again at 2 Samuel
6:16. (As the ark of the Lord
was entering the City of
David, Michal daughter of
Saul watched from a window.
And when she saw King
David leaping and dancing
before the Lord, she despised
him in her heart.)

Do you see where it says that Michal daughter of king Saul despised David for his show of emotion? The text here does not make it clear, but Michal is not simply the former king's daughter. She is David's wife!

1 Samuel 18 describes how she became David's first wife and how David became king Saul's son-in-law.

Let's read a little more about her attack upon David's

show of joy.

Read 2 Samuel 6:20-22
(I'm using the NIV), "When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" 21 David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose

me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel – I will celebrate before the Lord. 22 I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour.”

Michal says, “Look, you are the king. You need to be more dignified than this.

Control your emotions.”

David has a very interesting response. He says that he does not have to be dignified in front of the people, because it was God, and not the people who made him king. Since he is doing what the Lord wants, since he is celebrating before the Lord, it is only the Lord's opinion that matters. And he is going to get even more undignified. David doesn't care about

what people think – he is rejoicing before the Lord.

Notice the trailer in verse 23. It says that Michal never had any children.

It does not say that Michal had no children because she attacked David's show of joy, but the strong implication is that David was doing the Lord's will with his rejoicing, and Michal, with her attack, was not. Note that the Bible is not encouraging dancing but

is encouraging joy.

The bible leaves no doubt that joy can form a part of a goal. According to our text for today in Galatians 5:22, joy is a fruit and we are required to produce fruit. If you were to look up the word “joy” in any concordance, the texts that speak of joy cover several whole columns.

For example, turn with me to John 15:9-11 - “As the Father has loved me, so have

I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Do you see the picture here? God says that when we chose him there are two joyful persons: You and God.

Romans 14:17 tells us that the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, “but of righteousness, peace and joy.”

Jude 24 describes us appearing before the presence of God. Jude speaks of two characteristics which are present in those who stand before God: 1. They are faultless 2. They have great joy.

I’m talking to day about

joy, not happiness.

By definition, happiness depends on what happens; joy depends upon an attitude.

In text after text the Bible tells us that joy and rejoicing are God's desire for his people.

Oswald Chambers wrote, "Joy is the great note all through the Bible".

If you are not feeling joy this morning – and I note that

I didn't see any leaping or dancing in the sanctuary this morning – if you agree that joy can be a goal, that joy is something you would like to have more of in your life, then let us look together at what the Bible says about how to experience joy.

Lets unfold the Bible's road map to joy.

One thing worthy of note about road maps is that you've got to be on the right

page.

The compact 'Refedex' maps in a book have the map divided into pages with the continuation of each map written sideways along the edges of the page. Unless you read these, it is easy to find yourself on the wrong page.

The bible clearly identifies some wrong pages if you are looking for joy.

Let us identify just one of

these wrong pages – what does not bring joy?

King Solomon, King David's son, was not only the wisest man who ever lived, he was smart, he was rich he was successful and 1 Kings 11:1-3 tells us that he had 1000 wives (which makes me wonder about his really being smart and wise, and no doubt this made a dent in his riches too.)

If you have read the book

of Ecclesiastes you were also probably confronted with the fact that Solomon obviously suffered from periods without joy. In Ecclesiastes 1:18 King Solomon says the smarter you are, the more depressed you are likely to be.

He also tells us in Ecclesiastes 2:3-15 that he tried all sorts of things to find joy. First thing: drinking; second, work. Big building projects; third, property –

slaves and more herds and flocks than anyone; fourth, money – silver, gold and treasure; fifth, the arts – he had people singing for him; sixth, women – he had a harem. 700 wives and 300 concubines (or secondary wives); seventh, reputation.

He was a somebody, he was great; and, eighth, pleasure.

He says in verse 10 that he denied himself nothing that

his eyes desired.

Solomon says that none of these things brought him joy, they were all meaningless because he would die, be forgotten and in verse 18 it is recorded that he would leave all his stuff to the one who comes after him.

So the wisest man who ever lived, the one who really knew what he was talking about testifies that real joy is not found in money, property,

your job, your reputation or chasing after beautiful people.

Instead, the Bible's plan for joy is found elsewhere. This plan has five parts; a five-part plan for joy.

Lets get back to our example of King David. Turn back with me to 2 Samuel 6. Lets read 2 Samuel 6:8-10. "Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called

Perez Uzzah. 9 David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, “How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?”

10 He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David.

Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite.”

What does this say about David's emotions? It says he is angry! It says he was afraid, or worried, it shows

that he was frustrated and discouraged, thinking, “How will I ever get this ark home?”. It shows that David gave up. He left the ark with Obed-Edom.

Let me ask you. Is anger, fear, worry, frustration, and discouragement so that you feel like giving up, a regular part of your life? It was for David at that time.

But in a mere three months, we find that David

was leaping for joy. Sounds like a radio or television commercial: “You can loose 20 kilos in 90 days”. Anger to joy in 90 days. What made the difference? What turned anger and frustration into joy?

Simply that David learned God’s will. David spent the three months learning God’s will; learning God’s specific instructions for transporting the ark. It wasn’t supposed to be pulled in a cart – that is

what the Philistines did because they didn't know any better. God had given specific instructions that his ark was to be carried. That is why when David is leaping for joy we find the ark being carried.

Does it surprise you that a necessary element of joy is to find out God's instructions and then obey them? The text that we read earlier, John 15:9-11, explicitly links our joy to obeying God's

commandments.

A certain lady in America had been bugging her husband about the air filter in their car because she had read the owner's manual, and it was time for a change.

How many of you have seen an air filter for a car? Do you know what you do when it gets dirty? The filter part is almost always paper. So you throw it away and get a new one.

The problem was, neither of them read anything about how you did it.

They were convinced that what you did with the air filter was to wash it. And the household debate was whether the husband would wash it in petrol or in water. He argued for petrol and she argued for water.

She won out, and so he washed their air filter in water. He left it out to dry, but

he had a golfing appointment, and the air filter had not dried yet. He figured it could dry on the engine, so he installed the wet, soapy air filter back on the engine.

When he tried to start the engine, it would not start. Instead, when he opened the bonnet, soapy foam covered the engine.

So they put the air filter in the clothes dryer and turned it on.

I can tell that this lady reports that while this was going on, there was not much joy in their household.

A very simple matter was made very difficult because they did not consult the proper manuals.

And so it is with life. If you want to have joy, you must get to know our life-manual, the Bible, and you must follow its instructions.

The second part of the biblical plan for joy is worship. That is right. Being here today is part of the plan for joy.

By systematically going through the book of Psalms reading all the texts that translated the Hebrew word (*sim-khaw'*), which means joy, mirth, or gladness, a large number of those verses spoke about experiencing joy in the presence of the Lord. The

clear implication was that the two were related. An excellent example is Psalm 100.

Turn there with me. Psalms 100 - “A psalm. For giving thanks. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his ; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter

his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise
his name. 5 For the Lord is
good and his love endures
forever; his faithfulness
continues through all
generations.”

Another text, Psalm 16:11
ties these first two parts of the
plan for joy together. Psalms
16:11 - “You have made
known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in

your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

To paraphrase: “You have made know to me the path of life, you have told me how to live. You say I should live from your manual so that when I come into your presence I am filled with joy.

The third part of this plan for joy is trusting God. Psalm 94 verses 18 and 19 “When I said, “My foot is slipping,” your love, O Lord, supported

me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.”

Worry kills joy. The psalmist here says he had “great anxiety.” Or, in other words, big worries.

But he says the consolation of God brought him joy. Give God your worries!

That takes us to part four of the plan for joy. If trusting God with our problems and

our property brings joy, how about trusting Him with our lives?

When the angels came to the shepherd to announce the arrival of Jesus, do you remember what the angel said? Luke 2:10 “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people!”

The news that God came down from heaven for our sake, lived a perfect life for

our sake, died a horrid death in our place so that we can live forever with Him is cause for joy!

Do you see how this brings together the first three parts? Because He has saved us, we have joy in obedience, we have joy in coming into his presence and we have joy in casting our burdens upon him.

But the fifth and last part of our plan for joy may be the most important from a

practical point-of-view.

In a letter to the editor in the Adventist Review from a woman who was depressed came this complaint: she said that preachers whose sermons spoke about trust and joy and dependence on God only made her situation worse because they made her feel like a bigger sinner.

There are circumstances in life that clearly kill joy. Someone I know of lost both

of his children on the same day in motor accident. They were killed right in front of him by a drunk driver.

If that happened to me, I'm not sure I could handle a sermon on joy.

The Bible speaks to this. Turn with me to Psalm 137.

Psalm 137:1-4 - "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars

we hung our harps, 3 for there
our captors asked us for
songs, our tormentors
demanded songs of joy; they
said, “Sing us one of the
songs of Zion!” 4 How can
we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land?”

God’s people were in
captivity, they were feeling
awful, and the question was,
“how can we feel joy when
we are in a foreign land?”

And yet that is us today.

We are in a foreign land, we are in a land where parents see their children killed, we are in a land of sickness, and pain and death. We are in a land in which there is a war going on between good and evil.

The fifth and last part to achieving joy is to take the greater view.

Continue reading with me
Psalms 137 – verses 5 & 6:
“If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

may my right hand forget its skill. 6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.”

You can't play the harp if you don't use your right hand and you cannot sing for joy if your tongue is stuck to the roof of your mouth.

The psalmist says we are in exile now in a foreign country, but we should keep

our eyes on returning to
Jerusalem.

I call that the greater view.
We need to keep our eyes on
the goal. Jews suffering in
foreign lands today have a
saying that I want to borrow
from them.

They say, “Next year in
Jerusalem.” Their hope and
goal is that next year they will
be out of the foreign land, and
instead be in the Jewish
homeland: Jerusalem of

Israel.

We should say, “Next year in Jerusalem.” except we mean the New Jerusalem – The Holy City.

If you take the greater view, if your hope is set on heaven, then like the captive Jews described in Psalm 137, your hope for Heaven, your hope for an Earth made new, gives you joy. It lets you play your harp and sing your songs of Zion.

Proverbs 10:28 says, “The prospect of the righteous is joy.” our hope for the future gives us joy.

Jesus described that very thing to his disciples. He knew that they would soon go through a terrible time because of his upcoming crucifixion. So in john 16:22 he said: “Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

Now, because of tragedy, we may suffer grief, but Jesus says that he will see us again, and when he does no one -- absolutely no one -- will take away our joy.

Do you remember we read Psalm 137 about the Jews being in captivity and there only hope for joy was to look forward to going home?

Turn with me to Psalm 126, because this describes this homecoming. I'm going

to read it to us in closing.

Psalms 126 - “A song of ascents. When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. 4 Restore our fortunes, O

Lord, like streams in the
Negev. 5 Those who sow in
tears will reap with songs of
joy. 6 He who goes out
weeping, carrying seed to
sow, will return with songs of
joy, carrying sheaves with
him.”

The great God in heaven
will give you joy. May we be
next year in Jerusalem.

**Prayer: God of all joy,
thank you that, along with
Your peace, we can have
deep within us Your joy. Joy
that is not related to what
happens but who You are
and who You accept us to be
– joyful.**

**And may we be so filled
with your joy that our
joyous attitude draws others
to You the source of all joy.
As we leave this place this
morning, we ask for your
blessing to joyfully carry us**

**in your care until we meet
again, we ask in Jesus'
precious name, Amen.**



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The fruit of the Spirit is Peace

Even after more than 60 years of preaching, I love to start my sermons with “Open your Bibles please...” and today is no exception.

Open your Bibles please at Luke 12:49-56. “I am come to send fire on the earth; and

what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter,

and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the

earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?"

Fire. Baptism. Division. In what Walter Brueggeman terms the 'low holy days' of late summer, my selected passage for today is jarring, upsetting, unpleasant and rough, even.

This is the kind of reading a preacher might upon first glance, as he prepares to write his sermon outline, whisper to himself 'run away! Preach

from the Old Testament'. But these words are in our gospel. They are our words, and they are out of the mouth of Jesus.

And trust me, these are not the most unsettling words in the entire gospel.

I remember prac-teaching at Avondale Primary School many years ago and I focused on the New Testament. And it was always a surprise to my class when Jesus appeared to say things that they hadn't

heard before. “Jesus didn’t really say that”, they would assure themselves, one another and me. Or “He didn’t really mean it. Jesus was all about peace.”

It’s the ‘nice guy Jesus’ that we tend to see in greeting cards and inspirational gift shops. It’s the Jesus with washed, cascading locks, cuddling sheep and children, clean tunic and clean feet. It’s the Jesus that assures us that

we have a friend in him, that he is the wise father figure who will take care of it all on our behalf, that we have nothing to worry about, and have to take nothing on ourselves.

The fact that “Jesus was all about peace” is absolutely true, but we take less time understanding what the peace He offers us really means.

This is one of those passages where I could hear

the uncomfortable crickets chirping as I asked my students what they thought Jesus was really saying here. Sometimes I feel it myself when I read it.

Fire kindled, baptism under stress, division instead of peace, fighting among families and between brothers and sisters.

For many who have experienced family strife or division, this passage sits

heavily on hearts, especially when divided because of faith or religion or tradition.

Jesus' promise doesn't proclaim the healing and reconciliation that we assume he always means (and yes, sometimes get tired of hearing. God is love, yes, we get it, Amen).

Jesus promises nothing less than upheaval; change; destruction: all the scary words that we usually spend

our time and energy avoiding, rather than engaging in.

But perhaps this is one of those times when words can hold two meanings, such as the word 'dirt'. We think of 'dirt' as a bad thing, something to get rid of, to clean up, an infringement upon a set purity.

But really dirt is just 'matter out of place'. Food crumbs get on the couch: that is dirt. But food crumbs are

perfectly fine, they just shouldn't be on the couch. Soil from the garden on the newly shampooed rug? Soil is fine, it just shouldn't be found on the carpet.

Destruction, division, upheaval are foreboding words if we have been taught to keep the apple cart level and the status quo in place.

William Barclay, in his commentary, tells us that the Greek word for peace,

eiriene, came into the New Testament as a translation of the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*. In classical Greek, ‘peace’ was mainly negative, implying freedom from war or hostilities, but in the New Testament, the word gathers up positive elements such as are seen in *shalom*. The central meaning is serenity and harmony. The word for ‘Peace’ occurs one hundred and eleven times in 104 verses of the New Testament

in every single book
excepting 1st John.

We would rather think that
peace is a warm and
comfortable feeling of secure
happiness, when peace itself
is only available after conflict
and resolution.

Peace itself is not the
absence of conflict, but the
emergence of a new normal, a
new standard in the wake of
change, usually startling,
unsettling change.

Jesus' gospel, his message to us, his proclamation of God's will, had (and has) little to do with the peace that we envision or the karma that new-age spirituality books promise.

Jesus' beatitude in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers", has absolutely nothing to do with warm fuzzy feelings.

Peace does not affirm us, it informs us. It is what we get

when we accept that things must change and we along with them.

When we say ‘Peace on Earth’ at Christmastime, it is God’s peace that we are talking about, not our own.

The UNICEF holiday cards often proclaim ‘Peace on Earth’ and show pictures of children from all over the world holding hands.

That is not peace, although

it is God's will for peace. We often forget what is asked of us to sacrifice to obtain that sense of unity.

The gospel that Jesus offers his disciples and us today is a challenge to our notions of peace and our own understanding of the will of God.

At the time Luke was writing (in hindsight of course), peace was only obtained militarily, through

power, through force, through corruption and coercion.

Peace was based on subservience to a world power, not a goal that brought all nations and races together.

In the city of Rome at this time stood the Temple of Janus, dedicated to war. It was also known as the *Temple of the Doors* because when there was war the doors were to be left open. Only in times of peace could the doors ever

be closed. Theologian Roy Naden tells us that, according to one historian, in seven centuries the doors were only closed briefly twice, for Rome was an empire of war.

According to the Moody Bible Institute, since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than eight percent of the time!

In a study conducted by the periodical 'The Personnel

Journal', of 3,530 years of recorded history, only 286 years saw peace. Moreover, in excess of 8,000 peace treaties were made and broken.

The Jews have a proverb that describes the transitory nature of peace as “the wisp of straw that binds the sheaf of blessings”.

God's understanding of peace, God's own kingdom is built not on power, but on service, on humility, on

sacrifice and on the power of love transforming us into people who care for each other and not only for ourselves, our own power or personal profit. God's peace came to those who struggled against the systems and structures that made a mockery of all that love upheld, and conflated it with power and prestige, using it as a weapon, rather than an instrument of new life.

Way back in the 14th Century the pious Thomas À Kempis wrote that, “All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace”.

God’s peace was never intended to affirm or make easy, or make light. It was intended to make real. To acknowledge and deny and rise up against darkness. It was the result of the signs all around the disciples and the

crowds Jesus was speaking to, reminding them that the current state of being was not the ultimate state that God wished for His people. And this was liberation indeed for those who were struggling under it; for those who were yoked in servitude, in fear, in heartbreak, in oppression.

Coming back to the here and now. Not all of God's children, made in God's own image, are realizing that

“Jesus was really all about peace” in our day-to-day lives. Not all will acknowledge that Jesus does not promise to calm every storm in our life, however Jesus does promise to calm us in every storm of life.

Open your Bibles again, this time at Hebrews 11:29-40 “By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. By faith

the walls of Jericho fell down,
after they were compassed
about seven days. By faith the
harlot Rahab perished not
with them that believed not,
when she had received the
spies with peace. And what
shall I more say? for the time
would fail me to tell of
Gedeon, and of Barak, and of
Samson, and of Jephthae; of
David also, and Samuel, and
of the prophets: Who through
faith subdued kingdoms,
wrought righteousness,

obtained promises, stopped
the mouths of lions,
Quenched the violence of fire,
escaped the edge of the
sword, out of weakness were
made strong, waxed valiant in
fight, turned to flight the
armies of the aliens.

Verse 35: Women received
their dead raised to life again:
and others were tortured, not
accepting deliverance; that
they might obtain a better
resurrection: And others had

trial of cruel mockings and
scourgings, yea, moreover of
bonds and imprisonment:
They were stoned, they were
sawn asunder, were tempted,
were slain with the sword:
they wandered about in
sheepskins and goatskins;
being destitute, afflicted,
tormented; (Of whom the
world was not worthy:) they
wandered in deserts, and in
mountains, and in dens and
caves of the earth.

Verse 39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

There were no chapter divisions when this was written so let's continue reading the first couple of verse of Chapter 12:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so

great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

This passage from Hebrews cites those faithful

to God who have gone before us: prophets, judges, saints and all, who struggled with their understanding of God's peace throughout their lives.

Jonathan Myrick Daniels was a 26-year old seminarian from Southern New Hampshire in the late nineteen-sixties, studying at the Episcopal seminary in Cambridge. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, invited students to come and stand in

solidarity with those in Selma, Alabama, he was one of them.

After a week of demonstrations and sit-ins against segregation, he and another student started to think about how it might look to the African-American communities in Selma if they were just to leave and head back to school after a week of so-called 'helping'.

They decided to stay in

Selma to work and pray and live in community with those who they had just been ‘only helping’ before.

On August 20th, 1965, six days after being released from jail after a sit in, Jonathan and some friends entered a store to get some food.

The owner did not like that a young black girl was one of their party and threatened Daniels.

The man then aimed a shotgun at the young girl, but Daniels threw her out of the way and took the blast.

In his journals, the writings and prayers he offered were those of someone filled with a joy that was deeper than any happiness. He was experiencing the peace of God that came only when the motto 'keeping the peace' was being deconstructed so that all might experience peace,

not just the few.

Oscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador, spent the last three years of his life and tenure as Archbishop working and struggling for peace in El Salvador.

Not the peace of oppression that had been the norm, with the few rich and connected families at the top of the food chain creating governments to serve them and them only, but for the

peace which comes when fear is not the pre-eminent factor and feeling in one's life.

Monsignor Romero understood the gospel to proclaim God's peace, the peace that promised not just salvation in heaven, but liberation from oppression in this one.

He too was shot, while celebrating the Eucharist, at the small cancer hospice where he lived for those three

years. Like Daniels, Romero had no qualms, no doubts, that his journey, his agitation, his ministry was for peace, the peace which God promised, not the peace of false security and comfort.

Some days we forget that our faith asks of us, demands of us, to strive for more than just the nice cute peace we are often all sure that Jesus was all about.

I happened to be reading

through the 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship and I found a hymn by William A. Percy and Herbert G. Draesel Jr. that reminds us that our quest for peace is not a lonely one, but filled with others to walk with us on the way.

Here's how it goes: "They cast their nets in Galilee just off the hills of brown;

Such happy, simple fisher-folk, before the Lord came down.

Contented, peaceful
fishermen, before they ever
knew

The peace of God that
filled their hearts brimful, and
broke them too.

Young John who trimmed
the flapping sail, homeless in
Patmos died,

Peter, who hauled the
teeming net, head-down was
crucified.

The peace of God, it is no
peace, but strife closed in the
sod,

Yet let us pray for but one thing – the marvellous peace of God.”

And the fruit of the Spirit is ... peace. Jesus said, as recorded in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Like all of the fruit of the spirit, peace is given so that we may extend that peace to others.

The parable is told of a conversation between a wild dove and a sparrow.

“Tell me the weight of a snowflake,” a sparrow asked a wild dove. “Nothing more than nothing,” was the answer.

“In that case, I must tell

you a marvellous story,” the sparrow said. “I sat on the branch of a fir tree, close to its trunk, when it began to snow — not heavily, not in a raging blizzard — no, just like in a dream, without a sound, and without any violence.

Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their

number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch, ‘nothing more than nothing’, as you say, the branch broke off.”

Having said that, the sparrow flew away.

The dove, being an authority on peace since Noah’s time, thought about the story for a while, and finally said to herself, “Perhaps only one person’s

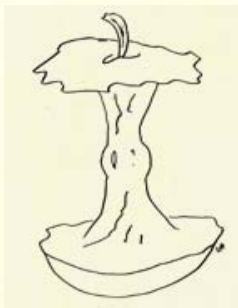
voice is lacking for peace to come to the world.”

Let me close with the words of the 19th Century poet John Greenleaf Whittier who wrote this prayer: “Drop Thy still dews of quietness, ‘till all our strivings cease. Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace”. Amen.

Prayer: At the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky, and flinging the clouds and the towers by, is a place of central calm. So here in the roar of mortal things, we have a place where our spirit sings, in the hollow of Your palm. Thank you God for the gift of peace, the fruit of accepting Your peace.

And in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may we be blessed with the

**peace of God, which
surpasses all understanding,
and shall keep our hearts
and minds through Christ
Jesus. Amen.**



The fruit of the Spirit is Longsuffering

Here is the patience of the saints. One friend commented to another as they walked to their cars after church. “That was a great sermon today on the fruit of the spirit being longsuffering.”

“Yes,” the other agreed,

“Longsuffering means that we were suffering as the sermon was far too long.”

I plan on delivering a not-too-long sermon today on the fruit of the spirit being longsuffering. I am reminded that a sermon need not be everlasting to have a message of eternal value.

While shaking hands with a certain pastor after worship, Mrs. Jones noticed that he had a rather bad cut on his

face.

“Why pastor, what happened? How did you cut your face?” she asked.

“Well, I was thinking about my sermon this morning while I was shaving,” the pastor replied. “I guess I wasn’t concentrating and cut myself in the process.”

“That’s too bad,” Mrs. Jones replied. “Next time you should concentrate on your

shaving and cut your sermon.”

George Burns is known to have said, “The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.”

However, some things cannot be hurried.

Thomas Edison’s teacher said he could never amount to anything and advised his

mother to take him out of school.

Winston Churchill was admitted to school in the lowest level classes and never moved out of the lowest group in all the years he attended Harrow.

Albert Einstein seemed so slow and dull that his parents feared that he was mentally deficient. One observer has said, “Great minds and high talent, in most cases, cannot

be hurried and, like healthy plants, grow slowly.”

There are two Greek words translated as “patience” in the New Testament. “*Hupomone*” means “a remaining under,” as when one bears up under a burden. It refers to steadfastness in difficult circumstances.

“*Makrothumia*”, which is used in Galatians 5:22, is a compound formed by “*macros*” (“long”) and

“*thumos*” (“passion” or “temper”).

“Patience” in Galatians 5:22 literally means “long temper,” in the sense of “the ability to hold one’s temper for a long time.” The King James Version translates it “longsuffering.” A patient person is able to endure much pain and suffering without complaining. A patient person is slow to anger as he waits for God to provide comfort

and punish wrongdoing.

Since it is a fruit of the Spirit, we can only possess “*makrothumia*” through the power and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I also wish to look at patience or longsuffering with a broader application while still being faithful to Scripture.

Back in 1980 I was leading a Scripture tutorial at what is

now Avondale University. I asked each student in turn what their favourite word in the Bible was and most answers were the expected ones, words such as 'love', 'forgiven', 'heaven' etc.

But one student answered with a choice that triggered an interesting discussion. His word was 'us-ward'. He read to us from 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men

count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Found only in the King James version, ‘us-ward’ uses the Greek suffix ‘*eis*’ (ice) to point God’s longsuffering patience directly at us. God is longsuffering and patient with us.

So, what reason do we have to be patient with

others?

Ulrike Ruffert wrote,
“Patience is the ability to put
up with people you’d like to
put down.”

A mean, worldly army
sergeant was converted, and
this was his testimony to his
fellow soldiers: “There is a
private in our company who
was converted. We gave that
fellow an awful time.

One night he came in from

sentry duty, very tired and wet, and before going to bed he got down to pray. I struck him on the side of the head with my boots, and he just went on with his prayers.

Next morning I found my boots beautifully polished by the side of my bed. That was his reply to me. It just broke my heart, and I was saved that day.” That is really a testimony of Christian longsuffering.

Look with me at Ephesians 4:2.

Ephesians 4:2 says, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”.

In Colossians 3:13 longsuffering is expanded to include forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13
“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against

any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

An old Greek Proverb reads, “One minute of patience equals ten years of peace.” What about patience while waiting in line? Is waiting in line longsuffering or suffering long? Is waiting in line a pure waste of time?

At Easter in 2021 I was preaching at an event being held in a public hospital. It was during a time when we

were required to register our attendance due to COVID-19 restrictions. There was quite a queue at the hospital entrance, and when I finally signed in I was asked if I would talk to a certain person known to be attending the event but who had jumped the queue. His description was given and I agreed to talk with him if possible.

After the event I identified the person concerned and

when I challenged him, he explained that he couldn't be bothered waiting in a queue, regarding the whole thing as a waste of time.

I spoke with him questioning the Christ-likeness of his attitude, and I suggested that he speak with the nurse at the reception and seek her forgiveness.

Later in the day when I was leaving, the particular nurse called me aside and

gratefully told me of his change of attitude and his apology.

Here is a secret so that you will never have to wait in line again: use the time to pray and contemplate God's will for your life.

I suspect that most people do not spend enough time in prayer.

You can trade this possibly wasted and otherwise

frustrating time into
productive time with God.

Remembering that a Dutch Proverb says that a handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains, I used waiting in line at seminary as a valuable opportunity to study Greek and Hebrew using small hand-held flashcards.

Joni Eareckson Tada wrote,
“Wait on the Lord in prayer as
you sit on the freeway,

sharing with him the anxiety of so many jobs to be done in such a short time. Watch your frustrations melt into praise as you sing hymns and choruses for his ears alone.”

Open your Bibles, please, at Joel 2:13. The book of Joel is found among the Minor Prophets tucked in between the books of Hosea and Amos.

Joel 2:13 says: And rend your heart, and not your

garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

This thought is expanded in 2 Peter 3:8

2 Peter 3:8 reads: But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Joel and Peter both suggest the same reason that that we should turn from our sins. The idea is that God is not waiting to “chop our head off.” He is not rubbing His hands together with glee waiting to destroy us.

Quite the opposite, God is giving us time to turn to Him by repenting and escaping punishment. God is taking His time in the hope we will turn to him.

Think about this for a minute but don't answer out loud. What kinds of sins has God forgiven you? Compare your sins with the sins of those people who test your patience for example parents with their children or children with their parents?

Another reason we need the Spirit's fruit to practice patience is found in Romans 15:5.

Romans 15:5 reads: Now

the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.

The reason this text gives for being patient or showing endurance with our fellow Christians is that of unity. Being longsuffering helps to promote unity.

This is extended in Ephesians 4:1-3.

Ephesians 4:1-3 reads: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Paul reinforces that being patient and “bearing with one another in love” promote our

goal of unity in the church. However, Paul adds a new idea. He writes of being humble and gentle. He suggests that humility and gentleness have something to do with patience.

I pause to think of the many Christians who chastise another member of the church because of pride and a lack of gentleness?

A further reason we need the Spirit's fruit to practice

patience is found in Romans 14:1-4.

Romans 14:1 reads: Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that

judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Paul says that, firstly, the one who wanted to avoid eating meat offered to pagan idols should not condemn those who do not see it the issue in the same way.

And secondly, those who think that these disputers are being silly, should not

condemn them.

Now we're not talking about the upholding or disregarding standards, because the topic is "disputable matters."

However, we need to be sure that our pride has not transformed a disputable matter into a standard.

How does Paul suggest that we should handle these kinds of debates about disputable issues?

We find his answer in
Romans 14:22-23.

Romans 14:22-23 “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

We should keep these things to ourselves. We

should show patience, instead condemnation, towards those who do not believe as we do. At the same time, if we believe something is sin, we need to follow our conscience.

I read an important challenge in this regard in the book, 'My Life Today', p. 52.

The writer said, 'Love is the law of Christ's kingdom. The Lord calls upon every one to reach a high standard.'

The lives of His people are to reveal love, meekness, long-suffering.

Long-suffering bears something, yea, many things, without seeking to be avenged by word or act. “Long-suffering” is patience with offence; long endurance.

If you are long-suffering, you will not impart to others your supposed knowledge of your brother’s mistakes and errors.

You will seek to help and save him, because he has been purchased with the blood of Christ.

“Tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”“

Dick Winn, in the daily devotional book “His Healing Love” wrote, “Satan ... gets God’s children to become fruit inspectors rather than fruit trees”.

We also need the Spirit’s fruit to practice patience because patience produces character.

Look with me at James 1:2-4.

James 1:2-4 “My brethren,

count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”.

The New International Version translates the last word of verse 3 as “perseverance.” Other translations read “patience,” “steadfastness” or

“endurance.” This is another aspect of patience. As you look at the context, the kind of patience that is described is the ability to look forward in faith when we are going through trials.

James tells us that this makes our faith “perfect and entire “ or “mature and complete.” When we go through something unpleasant, if we trust God, and He sees us through it, this

gives us confidence when the next temptation or trial comes. We look back on what God has done in the past and we have confidence that He will be there to help again. This kind of faith gives us a mature attitude.

Let's look at how we should apply these spiritual lessons to the realities of your life. When we are in a hurry and I am or you are driving our car, are we patient?

Should we be? Or, are these other drivers just wasting our time and no spiritual issues are involved? Bill McGlashen wrote,

“Patience is something you admire in the driver behind you, but not in one ahead.”

I seem to recall hearing someone once saying: “Never become irritable while waiting; if you are patient, you’ll find that you can wait much faster”.

What about our job? Are we impatient for promotion? Do we feel that we should have been given more responsibility, more money and more authority?

Look again at James 1:3-4.

James 1:3-4 (reading from the New Revised Standard Version) "... because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be

mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Perhaps these verses provides helpful advice about promotion as they suggest that perhaps we are not ready for promotion right now, and that patience in our present position will improve our skills and help us to be mature and complete.

Now we have the most excellent example of patience recorded for us within the

pages of our Bible.

Look with me at Exodus
34:5-7.

Exodus 34:5-7 says: “And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him (that’s Moses) [and stood with him] there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant

in goodness and truth,
Keeping mercy for thousands,
forgiving iniquity and
transgression and sin, and that
will by no means clear the
guilty; visiting the iniquity of
the fathers upon the children,
and upon the children's
children, unto the third and to
the fourth generation.”

Obviously being
longsuffering or “slow to
anger” is a form of patience
The Hebrew word arek (OR-

RAKE) means
“longsuffering.” Thus, what
God is saying about Himself
is very much like the
“patience” described as a fruit
of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

Something is very
important is being said in
Exodus 34:6. Notice that
when God describes Himself,
“slow to anger” is the third
term He uses, and He places it
before goodness or steadfast
love, suggesting that being

slow to anger is even more important than love.

As we consider the context, we see that God is slow to anger and patient in the framework of dealing with humans about our sin problem. Thus, slow to anger means slow to anger about our sins.

If we are talking about my sins (as opposed to yours), then I appreciate God not disciplining me (or destroying

me) right away. Giving me forgiveness is something I greatly appreciate. However, if I am less concerned about God giving you forgiveness of your sins, and if God shows patience towards your sins, then surely I am also required to show patience towards your sinfulness

It is simply an expectation not a virtue to be longsuffering or to 'suffer long' because of another's sin

towards me.

We all understand why we want God to show some patience with us when we sin. But, why should He? What point is served by God waiting? 2 Peter 3:15 says “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience with us is our salvation”.

If we look at our Exodus text, what follows from sin is punishment. Therefore, it seems that God is patient in

the hope that we will turn from our sins and (because He loves us) to escape punishment.

The fruit we have been discussion is from the Holy Spirit. The word ‘Comforter’ as applied to the Holy Spirit needs to be translated by some vigorous term. Literally, it means “with strength.” Jesus promised his followers that “The Strengtheners” would be with them.

E Paul Hovey said, “This promise is no lullaby for the fainthearted. It is a blood transfusion for courageous living”.

Patience or longsuffering as a fruit of the Spirit is not weakness, in fact, patience comes from a position of power. A person may have the ability to take revenge or cause trouble, but patience brings self-restraint and careful thinking.

Losing patience is a sign of weakness. We are patient through trying situations out of hope for a coming deliverance; we are patient with a trying person out of compassion. We choose to love that person and want what's best for him.

An anonymous poet wrote,
“When I am vexed and sore
and tried

And my impatience cannot
hide,

Let no one stumble over
me

Because Thy love they
failed to see.

But give me Lord, a life
that sings

And victory over many
things.....

O let me live through sin
and strife -

A gracious and unselfish
life.”

What about patience in waiting for Jesus to return and take us to heaven?

Look with me at Matthew 24:45-46

Matthew 24:45-46. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”

Jesus tells us that we should fill the time waiting for Him by doing the jobs He has given us. If we focus on the task, instead of the wait, it will not seem like we are waiting.

Peter Marshall wrote, “Teach us, O Lord, the disciplines of patience, for to wait is often harder than to work.”

To be long-suffering is not to be gloomy and sad, sour

and hardhearted; it is to be exactly the opposite.

Hannah Hurnard wrote, “In the early years of Christian experience he often meets our needs in striking ways in order to strengthen and confirm our new and weak faith. But the more experience of his goodness and faithfulness we have, the more he is able to test and develop our faith by teaching us long-suffering and the

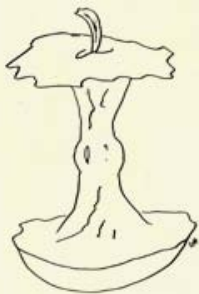
assurance to wait patiently.”

Someday He will be able to say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”

Do you feel impatient? Do I? Why not we both resolve to fill our waiting time with productive work - to be generous when it comes to the slowness of others because God has been generous to us in our slowness in doing His will. Will we decide today to ask of Holy Spirit the

required fruit to be more
patient?

Prayer: “Lord, please help us not to expect You hurry up and provide Your Spiritual fruit of patience, but may it be a fruit that grows on us so that we may demonstrate it in our lives. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”



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The fruit of the Spirit is Gentleness

Today's homily is part of a continuing series on the Fruit of The Spirit. Galatians 5:22, 23 - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such

there is no law.”

D L Moody summarised the fruit of the spirit with these words: “Joy is love exalted; peace is love in repose; long-suffering is love enduring; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love in school; and temperance is love in training.”

Donald Grey Barnhouse summarised the fruit of the

spirit with these words: “Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love’s touch. Goodness is love’s character. Faithfulness is love’s habit. Gentleness is love’s self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love holding the reins.”

Today we will focus on Gentleness.

Florence Littauer was quoted in Christianity Today

Magazine as saying,
“Although the world tells us
to be assertive, [God’s] Word
tells us to be gentle.”

Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft
answer turneth away wrath:
but grievous words stir up
anger.” The Hebrew word for
“soft” in the King James
Version is “Rak” and can be
variously translated “gentle”,
tender-hearted”, “soft”,
“mollification” or
“pacifying”.

In the late 1500s, Jean Pierre Camus wrote, “Anger is quieted by a gentle word just as fire is quenched by water”.

A parable is told of the sun and the wind who were arguing about who was the stronger and whose power was greatest. The wind proposed a test. He said, “See the man walking along that road? The one who can take his cloak shall be determined

most powerful.”

The sun agreed, and since the wind devised the test he chose to go first. He blew very hard but for all his bluster the man only clutched the cloak all the more tightly.

The sun was now offered his chance. The sun smiled down on the man and soon the man began to grow warm. By and by the he removed his cloak and sat down on a log to enjoy the sun. When the

man arose he forgot that he had left his cloak lying on the log and happily continued on his way. The sun then told the wind that there is more power and strength through gentleness than by force.

A Latin Proverb says, “Power can do by gentleness what violence fails to accomplish”.

Saint Francis of Sales wrote, “Nothing is so strong as gentleness; nothing so

gentle as real strength.”

Open your Bibles at 2 Timothy 2:24-26 - “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken

captive by him at his will.”

The NIV of verse (25) reads, “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct”.

John Newton wrote in a letter to a fellow believer, “What will it profit a man if he gains his cause, and silences his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble, [gentle] frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is

made?"

D L Moody wrote, "A man can counterfeit love, he can counterfeit faith, he can counterfeit hope and all the other graces, but it is very difficult to counterfeit humility [or gentleness]."

My adaptation of a quote from Emily Morgan reads, "Before we can feel [gentleness] for others, we must feel the [gentleness] of God.

Paul writes, Philippians 4:5

- Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. (King James Version). Other translations say, “Let your gentleness be evident to all” or “Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men”.

The term that is translated “moderation”, “gentleness” or “forbearing” here is a word which is difficult to translate into English. We don’t have

an exact English counterpart. It conveys the idea of a non-defensive attitude. It pictures the person who doesn't assert his own rights, who doesn't insist on his own way, who doesn't try to defend himself.

It is translated in other places in Scripture as gentleness. But that is still not quite the meaning of the word. It is a person who forgoes his own rights, who will not insist on pushing

through his own program in his own way and according to his own time schedule.

Gentleness is possible, Paul points out, because the Lord is near. These two terms are related: “Let your gentleness be known to all men. [and] The Lord is at hand.” He may be referring here to the soon-ness of the coming of Christ. But I suggest that he is referring to the fact that the Lord is

present now. He is here. He is at hand.

He is our defence. He is the one who takes care of us. He is the one who provides for our needs. He fights our battles for us so that we don't need to fight them. We don't need to defend ourselves. We don't need to assert ourselves, do our own thing, insist on our own way. The Lord will fight for us.

When I think of men of

gentleness, two illustrations come to mind from the Old Testament. The first is Abraham. Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, an area where the people were idol worshipers with little knowledge of the true God. He was called by God over into the land of Canaan.

When he arrived there the Lord gave him the promise of the entire land. It was all to be

his. The dimensions of the land are described for us in the book of Genesis - from beyond Mt. Hermon in the north all the way south to the land of Egypt, from the Mediterranean Sea east to the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. God gave him the title deed - the promise that was conditioned on the faithfulness of God.

As the story unfolds you come to the episode when Lot's herdsmen came in

conflict with Abraham's herdsman as their flocks began to multiply. Lot, though he was Abraham's nephew, was a source of strife in the family. So Abraham confronted Lot with the situation.

Now, Abraham could have insisted that Lot give him the land, that Lot move his flocks someplace else, because the land was Abraham's. But he didn't do it. He let Lot

choose. Lot chose the Valley of Sidon, the area around Sodom and Gomorrah. And the rest of his life is a story of steady decline in the quality of that life.

At the very end you find him living in a cave outside the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had lost his wealth. He had, for all practical purposes, lost his family - his daughters were hopelessly corrupted by their

life in Sodom. He had nothing to show for his choice.

On the other hand Abraham, who let God choose for him, had the whole land. God took him up on a mountain and said, “Abraham, look to the north and the south and the east and the west as far as your eye can see - that is your land.” God multiplied his flocks and his family and gave him thousands upon thousands of

descendents, because Abraham let God make the choice for him. He let God fight his battles.

I think also of Moses.

Moses is described in the Old Testament as the meekest man whoever lived, that is to say that he did not insist on his own rights, he didn't defend himself. Whenever conflict would develop in the nation of Israel, whenever he was opposed in his leadership,

Moses would go to a little tent he kept off to the side, and he would get on his knees and say, “Lord, what shall I do?” And the Lord would fight his battles for him. Moses never had to defend himself. He never had to insist that he was the leader. He let God fight his battles.

That is gentle forbearance. Paul says, “Let your forbearance be known to all men because the Lord is at

hand. The Lord will fight your battles.” We don’t have to defend ourselves. We may have to defend the rights of others, and we may have to stand up for a principle that is at stake, but where our own rights are all that is at stake, we don’t need to defend ourselves. God will fight for us. He is at hand.

Charles R. Swindoll wrote, “In our rough-and-rugged individualism, we think of

gentleness as weakness, being soft, and virtually spineless.

Not so! ... Gentleness includes such enviable qualities as having strength under control, being calm and peaceful when surrounded by a heated atmosphere, emitting a soothing effect on those who may be angry or otherwise beside themselves, and possessing tact and gracious courtesy that causes others to retain their self-

esteem and dignity.... Instead of losing, the gentle gain. Instead of being ripped off and taken advantage of, they come out ahead!”

Smooth words create an atmosphere of gentleness that heals roughness and bitterness.

Maxie Dunnam wrote,
“The gentle are courteous and kind; exercise restraint; practice reticence in speech, knowing that words can

wound and silence may be more affirming than chatter; [gentle folk] do not intrude into another's life but are available to and responsive to other's needs."

Richard L. Dunagin warns of the danger of not being gentle. He wrote, "At their school carnival, our [children] won four free goldfish (lucky us!), so out I went [the next] morning to find an aquarium. The first few I priced ranged

from \$40 to \$70. Then I spotted it right in the aisle: a discarded 10-gallon display tank, complete with gravel and filter for a mere five dollars. Sold! Of course, it was nasty dirty, but the savings made the two hours of clean-up a breeze.”

“Those four new fish looked great in their new home, at least for the first day. But by Sunday one had died. Too bad, but three remained.

Monday morning revealed a second casualty, and by Monday night a third goldfish had gone belly up. We called in an expert member of our church who has a 30-gallon tank. It didn't take him long to discover the problem: I had washed the tank with soap, and absolute no-no. My uninformed efforts had destroyed the very lives I was trying to protect."

Dunagin goes on to say,

“Sometimes our in zeal to clean up our own lives or the lives of others, we unfortunately use “killer soaps” – condemnation, criticism, nagging, fits of temper. We think we’re doing right, but our harsh, self-righteous treatment is more than they can bear.” What we need is Spirit-gifted gentleness.

A scientist once conducted an interesting experiment in

his laboratory to test out the effectiveness of gentleness. From the ceiling he suspended an iron ball weighing a ton, attaching it to a cable strong enough to sustain its weight.

Beside the huge iron ball, he hung a small sphere made of cork attached to a thread fastened to the ceiling.

An electrical mechanism kept the little cork ball swinging slowly, pendulum-

like, against the iron weight.

At length, after days of unceasing gentle swinging back and forth on the part of the cork, the iron ball weighing a ton began to swing very gently to and fro in harmony with the little cork ball.

Gradually, its motion increased until it was prescribing a wide arc, all because a tiny cork ball had kept gently and persistently

knocking against its massive side, day in and day out.

Our effort to influence people to love God, accept Christ as Saviour, and live under the direction of the Holy Spirit should be persistent and faithful, but more importantly, we should be as gentle as the tapping of the ball of cork.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote, “Advice is like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it

dwells upon and the deeper it sinks into the mind”.

There was an old man who carried a little can of oil with him everywhere he went. If he passed through a door that squeaked, he poured a little oil on the hinges.

If a gate was hard to open, he oiled the latch. So he went through life lubricating all the hard places and making it easier for those who came after him.

People called him eccentric, queer, cranky, odd, and other degrading names.

But the old man went steadily on, refilling his can of oil when it became empty and oiling the hard places he found.

He did not wait until he found a creaky door or a rusty hinge and then go home to get his oil; he carried it with him.

There are many lives that

creak and grate harshly day by day. They need lubricating with the oil of gentleness.

That can of oil is predominantly one that characterizes the fruit of the Spirit. The task of using it belongs to those who claim to be Christians.

As the old man kept his oil with him, so we need to keep our gentleness handy. It does no good if left at home or in the church.

One dramatic example of the gentleness gifted as a fruit by the Holy Spirit is that of Father Cummings.

It was Christmas Eve, 1941. Sergeant Sidney Stewart was preparing American troops to leave Manila to fight the Japanese in Bataan.

Working late in his office, he looked up to find a white-robed Catholic priest at his door. Stewart, a Protestant

boy from Oklahoma, did not know it, but his life would soon be intertwined with the frail-looking priest.

“I'm Father Cummings,” the priest said. “I heard you boys were leaving in an hour or so. I wonder if I could go with you to Bataan. I'm sure that they will need me there.”

Father Cummings came along, but once there, Stewart lost track of him.

Then in April 1942, the Japanese captured Stewart's unit. "YAHURA!" the guards yelled. "Start moving!"

The infamous Bataan Death March had begun. Denied food and water and abused by their captors, thousands died.

A POW camp awaited survivors. There, as sadistic guards lined them up in the hot sun, Stewart felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. It was

Father Cummings! He was desperately thin, but radiated immense gentleness.

Looking into the hopeless faces all around him, the priest muttered, “I must work harder. These men need me.”

That evening, the men listened as he gently spoke of God simply and directly.

As Stewart recalls in his book, *‘Give Us This Day’*, God (quote) “became a real

presence beside us. We felt Him there.”

In 1944, the prisoners were packed into the hold of a ship bound for Japan. Given no food or water, some were driven mad by thirst.

Events took a tragic turn when American pilots attacked the ship, not knowing it contained US POWs.

Yet that night, over

screams of pain and cries for water, there came a gentle voice: “Listen to me, men! You must listen to me.”

And then he began to pray. “Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name...”

Each night Father Cummings, himself sick and weak, gently prayed — and each night, sanity returned to the hold.

Stewart wrote, “I looked forward every hour for night to come, when Father Cummings stood and [with a gentle voice] said his prayer again. It was the only strength I had.”

Finally a night came when the priest was too weak to stand. Stewart propped him up, and he slowly began to pray. “Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name...”

The cries of the men became still. “Thy will be done — on earth — as it is — in Heaven.” A spasm of pain shook the priest, and he gasped for air. And then, with superhuman effort, he spoke one last time. His body relaxed, and he was gone.

But the memory of his gentleness and sacrificial love sustained Stewart in the terrible months ahead.

While I was a member of a

Bray Park (NSW) Church and through my occasional visits to minister at a Murwillumbah Church, I got to know and love Pastor Brett and Gae-Maree Townend, a couple who also ministered at both churches.

Brett has a reputation for compassionate horsemanship and what is known as the gentle art of ‘horse whispering’.

I was reminded of Brett

when I read the book, “Return to Snowy River.”

In this book, the central character is a young man named Jim, a master at capturing and gently training wild horses. His herd had been stolen and he had taken off after them on his best mount. But horse thieves shot and killed Jim's horse.

It looked hopeless, but then, standing before Jim was the magnificent stallion who

covered the whole herd. Because of his beauty, strength and tremendous speed, many had desired to capture the stallion, but the great horse never allowed anyone near him. Jim's horse was the stallion's favourite mare.

The stallion gazed at the dead mare. He appeared stunned and oblivious to everything surrounding him as Jim approached him

slowly. Amazingly, Jim was allowed to gently touch and then to stroke the beautiful horse's head. Then, gently, he put the bridle and the saddle on him.

Almost miraculously, the stallion was allowing the encroachment of this gentle man, as he had no other.

The moment of truth came when Jim put his foot into the stirrup and threw his leg over the back of the great horse.

With all his strength the horse reared, throwing the intruder into the dust and galloping off, taking the saddle and gear with him.

Discouraged and dejected, Jim bedded down for the night. At dawn, he was awakened by the sounds of cracking twigs.

With one eye opened he lay very still. The powerful stallion cautiously came near and stood directly beside him.

His grand head bowed
directly over Jim's.

With both eyes now open
and with a smile of joy, Jim
saw the reins fall to the
ground before his face in an
unmistakable gesture of
surrender.

It was the loving touch and
the gentleness of the talented
trainer that brought the horse
back to bow his head and
drop the reigns before him.

Jim took hold of the surrendered reins. This was the one horse most fit for the task of recapturing the herd. The mission of the young master in the novel was accomplished.

Do we demonstrate gentleness? Are we gentle?

Marion Doyle penned a poem titled, “Kindness is a Blessed Thing”.

Here’s how it goes:

“God be thanked for gentle
folk

Who know the art of
kindliness . . .

Who never fail to leave
their way

To aid another in distress,
However crowded be their
day.

God be thanked for gentle
folk

Who know the healing
word to say

When flesh recoils at

pain's swift sting

Or hearts are galled by
sorrow's yoke.

Oh, kindness is a blessed
thing . . .

God smiles through eyes of
gentle folk.

Jesus often used imagery
and in John 10, He uses the
image of a gentle shepherd
and his sheep to picture His
relationship with His people.

He even pictures Himself as the gate of the sheepfold in verses 7-11.

John 10 verses 7-11: “Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief

cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”

Sheep are really intelligent but, like us, they do some pretty stupid things. They will stay in a field full of rocks and starve to death when lush green grass is only a few feet

away. The shepherd must lead them to food. They are easily fooled and confused. They habitually gather together and follow the crowd, easily slipping into dangerous situations. They have no ability to protect themselves when they are attacked.

In ancient Israel, sheep were an important part of the economy because they provided wool and meat. The sheep had to be cared for so

they didn't get lost, hurt, or separated from the flock. A lost sheep is very easily eaten by wolves or stolen.

Sheep are a close comparison to us sinful humans. We are very easily confused. We follow the wrong leader, and are easily attacked spiritually. Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...”

It is the gentle love of a shepherd for his sheep that stands out in John 10.

In Jesus' day shepherding was the lowliest of jobs. Sheep are dirty and ornery, and keeping them safe might call for great sacrifice, even the death of the shepherd.

A true shepherd will care for his flock with such tenderness that he knows each sheep by name. They are not just a flock but individual

sheep, each one special in its own right. They respond to the shepherd's gentle voice because there is a kind-of personal relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

Just as, in the vast flock that is His church, Jesus knows each believer by name. There is no anonymity in God's flock.

C S. Lewis in his book, 'Mere Christianity', wrote, "The Son of God became man

to enable men to become the sons of God”. Jesus, the shepherd, is the epitome of Gentleness. Our key text in Galatians 5:23 tells us that gentleness is a fruit of the spirit. Surely Spirit-filled sheep and lambs will demonstrate gentleness in their lives.

And my closing thought is from Chick Velasco, who wrote, “When someone looks into my eyes, can they truly

see – that [gentleness] of
God, that dwells inside of
me?

Prayer: May the Lord bless you, and keep you: May the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you: May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. May you have grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, from His comforting Spirit, and from the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. And the promised providence, protection, peace and provision, which

**surpasses all understanding,
shall keep your hearts and
minds through Christ Jesus.
Amen**



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The fruit of the Spirit is Goodness

A worldly optimist lives by the rule that life is good but the Christian optimist lives by the rule that God is good.

John Henry Newman wrote, "All that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful, all that is

beneficent, be it great or small, be it perfect or fragmentary, natural as well as supernatural, moral as well as material, [all] comes from God."

Galatians 5:22 - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith"

Today I want to reflect on the portion of that verse that says that one fruit of the Spirit is goodness.

My wife Rosemary and I went to a young people's meeting at a Queensland Annual Church Convention many years ago, as we had heard that our daughter was to be singing in the choir.

The meeting began with the speaker announcing, "God is Good" and the congregation of young people, obviously familiar with this particular speaker's manner, responded in a chant,

"All the Time."

The speaker then announced, "All the Time." To which the congregation antiphoned, "God is Good".

The futurist and author George Orwell wrote, "On the whole, human beings want to be good, but not too good and not quite all the time."

In a moment I would like to read Mark 10:17-18, and while we are looking that up,

contemplate these lines
penned by the 19th. Century
poet, John Greenleaf Whittier,
who wrote, "I see the wrong
that round me lies, I feel the
guilt within; I hear, with
groan and travail-cries, the
world confess its sin. Yet, in
the maddening maze of
things, and tossed by storm
and flood, to one fix-ed trust
my spirit clings: I know that
God is good!"

Mark 10:17-18. And when

he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? 18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.

Our Lord says that only God is good. Should we forget the rest of this sermon about goodness and discuss a different topic today?

James Martineau wrote,
"To get good is animal; to do
good is human; to be good is
divine."

Jesus is not saying that He
is not God, He is, however,
challenging the sincerity of
this man's question. Who, but
God, has complete knowledge
of the qualifications to enter
heaven?

Look with me at verses 19
and 20. Thou knowest the
commandments, Do not

commit adultery, Do not kill,
Do not steal, Do not bear
false witness, Defraud not,
Honour thy father and mother.
20. And he answered and said
unto him, Master, all these
have I observed from my
youth.

Our Lord now seems to
suggest that keeping the
commandments (perhaps call
them ‘works’) is the path to
heaven. This man believes
that he keeps the

commandments and is therefore qualified for heaven.

Reading verse 21. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

Hmmm. I don't remember that in the Ten

Commandments. I sure hope that Jesus isn't one of those people that you don't want to play Scrabble with because they change the rules whenever you are winning?

Before I get myself into hot water, let us continue reading - Mark 10:22-26. And he (that's the man who came to Jesus) ... he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. 23. And Jesus

looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 24. And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26.

And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

The disciples were amazed to hear that those who had been blessed by God with earthly life and wealth somehow were less likely to be blessed by God with eternal life and wealth. To understand goodness in the context of our sermon, let's go through Jesus' statements.

Perhaps you're wondering what the Ten Commandments have to do with taking money from those who have earned it and giving it to those who have not.

When the rich man answered that he had always kept the Ten Commandments, he spoke of his own efforts.

By asking him to give away his money, Jesus was asking him to rely on God rather than the money

produced by his own efforts.

Is Jesus telling us that we must keep the Ten Commandments to go to heaven? Is giving up all of our stuff part of the Ten Commandments?

Jesus first told the rich man that "only God is good" to have the rich man acknowledge that Jesus was God.

When Jesus asked the rich

man to sell his possessions and follow Jesus, that was a request to depend wholly on Jesus.

The first commandment (Exodus 20:3) says we should have no gods before the true God. By choosing money over Jesus, the rich man showed he was not keeping even the first of the Ten Commandments.

When Jesus said in verse 21, "one thing you lack," He

apparently meant the rich man lacked the first thing when it came to keeping the Ten Commandments!

I wonder what kind of score we would have in keeping the Ten Commandments in our own strength.

In the 15th. Century, Hugh Latimer wrote, “We must first be made good before we can do good; we must first be made just, before our works can please God. When we are

justified by faith in Christ,
then come good works.”

Our next thought comes
from the next verse – verse
27: And Jesus looking upon
them saith, With men it is
impossible, but not with God:
for with God all things are
possible.

This teaches us something
about goodness. Only God is
good. Any goodness we have
comes from God, we cannot
produce it by our own efforts.

Of course, effort is involved ... it would take the most determined effort for this man to give away his money.

What if God asked you to give away your motorcar? Not everything, just your motorcar. How difficult a decision would that be?

Erwin W. Lutzer wrote, "Think of how good God is! He gives us the physical, mental, and spiritual ability to

work in his kingdom, and then He rewards us for doing it!"

Open your Scriptures at Romans 3:19-20. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by

the law is the knowledge of sin.

Paul and the rich man who questioned Jesus seem to have two different views of the Ten Commandments.

After the rich man spoke with Jesus, surely he would agree with Paul as Jesus gave the rich man a deeper insight into what it meant to keep the Commandments.

Instead of thinking that he

kept the commandments, the rich man was silenced and sad. Paul tells us that if we understand the Commandments, we become conscious of the extent of our sins.

We, like the rich man who came to Jesus, must come to God to more clearly understand the vast gulf between our actions and true goodness.

So Jesus and Paul both teach us about the nature of

goodness, and that is that only God is good and our first step towards goodness is recognizing our need to depend on God.

Don't leave the Book of Romans yet, but think on these words from Amos 5:14,15 which says, "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you...."

Let's look together at

Romans 7:7-9. What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. 8. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence (or sexual desire). For without the law sin was dead. 9. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin

revived, and I died.

If sin is dead apart from the law, many will conclude that we ought to get rid of the law. There are many Christians who do not think the law has any relationship to their new-covenant life today. Are they right? Or, are they like the rich man who came to Jesus to find out what he needed to do to enter heaven?

Reading verse 13 (we're still in Romans 7) - Was then

that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

The rich man did not understand the sinful nature of his heart, he did not understand the depth of the law's requirements.

The same is true of anyone who ignores the law. They are

incapable of understanding their true lack of goodness.

Theologians refer to the next few verses as 'Paul's Dilemma'. Romans 7:14-20. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. 16. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. 17. Now then it is no

more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 18. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. 19. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

We may well ask, “Are

good works, is goodness, just impossible for us?"

I remember listening to a child using the argument, "he made me do it?" Paul does say "sin made me do it", but his point is not to create blame, but rather to show that it is essential to recognise the sin in our life.

Let's continue reading Romans 7:24 and when this was written, there were no chapter divisions so we will

read on into chapter 8.

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. / 8:1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 3. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

It appears that goodness is possible after all. And the key to it is claiming the perfect life of Jesus in place of our life. Living according to the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is ... goodness."

Galatians 5:22

Look at Romans 8:5. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

This text tells us that

goodness is setting our mind on what the Spirit desires. Here we have the first two steps to goodness. Depending on God, and then setting our mind on what God desires in our life.

Jump down to verse 12 of Romans 8. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do

mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. 14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Will our goodness increase? Can our "goodness rating" improve? When Paul writes of putting to "death the misdeeds of the body" he is talking about reducing the bad actions in our life. Being good starts with the proper mental attitude of dependence

on God, but living a life in the Spirit means there will be concrete improvements in our life.

How can we set our mind on what the Spirit desires? Is this just a declaration on our part? A gritting of our teeth? Concentrating?

Read with me the opening lines of the second Psalter of Psalms 119, We're reading Verses 9-11. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his

way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. 10.

With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. 11. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

The clearest way to set our mind on God's will is to read His will - the Bible! A second way is to constantly invite the Holy Spirit to guide our

decision-making. And these two methods will not conflict with each other.

Turn now to the New Testament again, this time to Ephesians 2:8-10. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9. Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before

ordained that we should walk in them.

So the reason for our creation is simply to do good works. To show goodness.

Here's a rhetorical question. That's one we answer with our hearts rather than our lips. What percentage of our time is used to do good works? If that is the reason for our creation, how are we living up to our purpose?

If my questions trouble us, and we want to increase our good works time, we do it by depending on God, living in the Spirit and learning God's will by reading His word. The answer is not "do more good works," but seek God's will in doing more good works. Asking God to open up these opportunities for us.

One last passage before we close: Titus 2:11-14. For the grace of God that bringeth

salvation hath appeared to all men, 12. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13. Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14. Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. 15.

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

In case my suggestion to seek God's will in doing more good works seemed a little vague, there are some concrete points of action here. God's offer of salvation teaches us to say "No" to the passions and ungodliness of the world, and "Yes," to self-control, upright and Godly

lives.

God's Holy Spirit can give us a new attitude when it comes to goodness. As living in the power of the Holy Spirit purifies us, we become eager to do God's will and to live a life of goodness.

Theologian Oswald Chambers wrote, "God cannot accept goodness from me. He can only accept my badness, and he will give me the solid goodness of the Lord

Jesus in exchange for it.”

Unlike the rich man, will we decide to depend upon God, set our minds on what the Spirit desires and live a life of goodness?

God is good, all the time.

Such refrains do not need to rhyme.

God is good, I'll not deny,
God's goodness shines
across the sky.

In every leaf and budding
flower,

In sun-bleached desert and
shady bower.

In every creature from His
hand, in every deed from
ours,

God's goodness cannot
hide itself, as through our
waking hours

God's goodness never
takes a rest.

His goodness gives us
every breath.

And even while asleep His
goodness makes us blest.

He keeps us safe to wake

again to give to us the best.

Yes, just a simple line: All
the time,

God is good; God is good,
all the time.

**Prayer: May God's
goodness be your daily
delight. May you be blest by
Him. May He look
favourably on every
circumstance of your life
and may we all be kept
faithful to Him. In
Jesus' name, Amen.**



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The fruit of the Spirit is Faithfulness

Writer James S. Hewett, invites us to consider these examples of faithfulness: If your car started one out of three times, would you consider it faithful? If the paperboy skipped Monday and Thursdays, would they be

missed? If you didn't show up at work two or three times a month, would your boss call you faithful? If your refrigerator quit a day now and then, would you excuse it and say, "Oh, well, it works most of the time."

If your water heater greets you with cold water one or two mornings a week while you were in the shower, would it be faithful? If you miss a couple of mortgage

payments over the course of a year, would your mortgage provider say, “Oh, well, ten out of twelve isn’t bad”? If you miss worship and attend meetings only often enough to show you’re interested but not often enough to get involved, are you faithful?

We have been working our way through the fruit of the Spirit revealed to us in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians – and today’s subject is Faith or

Faithfulness.

You will be aware that the underlying topic of faith is a massive one that could occupy us for many weeks. I will only be touching lightly on it. However, our understanding of faith is pivotal to our understanding of our Christian walk – perhaps I shall delve deeper into this subject in another homily.

Before I address our

particular topic, I think it is wise to review the background to the listing of the Fruit of The Spirit.

The Galatians were having problems with erroneous teachings and this was leading them to move away from the truth of the gospel. In fact this was a problem that Paul had to deal with throughout his ministry and it explains Paul's attention to the concept of salvation by

grace through faith.

At that time there was a cultural problem. For all of their history the Jews had seen themselves as the chosen people of God – for a fairly good reason – as God had said that they were.

However, they saw it on racial grounds, passed down as an inheritance.

In fact, if a person who was not racially of the Jews

wanted to worship God there was a requirement that they accept the law, demonstrated in men by circumcision. There was a mark of racial separation.

An example is the racial hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans in Jesus time.

This was not just a philosophical belief, it was a very deeply ingrained concept. It was fundamental to their position that the law is

God's love-gift to his people and by fulfilling its requirements they believed that they could attain the righteousness of God.

The young church was dominated mostly by racially Jewish Christians, and this caused a problem. They felt that it was necessary that a person first legally become a Jew before that person could become a Christian! They just couldn't abandon this

concept. For example, Acts 15:1 says, “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”

The reality of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ was not well understood in the young church – particularly in Jerusalem. We are blessed in

that we have all of the New Testament writings, all of the old, and years of theological analysis. They had the teaching of some of the Apostles and not all of them were as theologically astute as Paul became through God's calling. And even Peter, who had been specifically called to the Gentiles, strayed in his application.

Paul had visited the

Galatians with Timothy and Silas soon after the issues were raised in Antioch, so you can be sure that Paul would have been most specific in his teaching of them – particularly as he had confronted the issue in Antioch..

Paul says in Galatians 1:6 & 7 (and I'm reading from the NIV) "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called

you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

I don't think that Paul could have put his concern more clearly.

I have shared this background, because the word used in the Bible in our key text Galatians 5:22 is

either faith or faithfulness – depending on the translation you use.

But the Greek word used is the one that is used elsewhere in the Epistles for faith. I expect that various translators use the alternative based on their understanding of the context.

We actually have two different meanings – although they are related.

A dictionary definition of the noun, faith, is – great trust and confidence in something or someone.

Of the adjective, faithful, the definition is - loyal, true or not changing any of the details etc of the original. An example would be not engaging in an outside-marriage sexual relationship.

And from there the noun, faithfulness, is – the quality of being faithful to someone

or something.

When we talk about faithfulness in normal context we think of words like fidelity, loyalty, piety, trustworthiness, dependability, constancy

That is, we think about the characteristic as a general distinctive rather than a specific one. The emphasis is on the characteristic and the subject – the person exhibiting faithfulness.

When we talk about faith in normal context we think of words like belief, certainty, confidence, conviction, dependence, reliance, sureness, truth

That is, we think about a specific character trait rather than a general one. The emphasis is on the process and the object – the specific object of faith.

In 1883 the US Marines adopted the slogan: Semper

Fidelis, a Latin phrase meaning “Always Faithful.” For the Marines, it’s more than a motto; it’s a way of life, and it expresses the commitment they feel toward their country and each other.

That’s why there are no ex-Marines, only former Marines. “Semper Fi” should be the slogan for every successful relationship, especially our relationship with God.

Most of the over 200 words in the dictionary that end in the suffix ‘~ful’ have the definition of being full of the word preceding it, For example, cheerful = full of cheer, beautiful = filled with beauty, boastful = filled with boasting, colourful = filled with colour, deceitful = filled with deceit, dreadful = filled with dread, respectful = filled with respect, and bashful = filled with abash (which an obsolete word meaning

sheepish, shy or diffident),
etcetera.

However, faithfulness does
not mean being full of faith.
You can be a '*professor*' of
the faith without being a
'*possessor*' of the faith.

For example, the bible
talks about the faithfulness of
God but God has no need of
faith. God is trustworthy,
dependable, constant, loyal
and true – faithful.

Jane Montgomery
Campbell translated a poem
by Matthias Claudius with
these words, “We plough the
fields, and scatter the good
seed on the land, but it is fed
and watered by God’s
Almighty hand.” That’s
faithfulness..

In 1997 I met a young
woman by the name of
Chantelle Hart. Chantelle had
been in and out of mental
institutions for much of her

life, but when she found Jesus her life was radically changed. This is what she wrote in response:

“He gave me strength,
when I was weak, He saw my
need, he wondered if I’d see!
He gave me hope, where I
had none, He gave me
courage, for the things done,
He gave me light, the
presence of his love, He gave
me beauty, where I should
have none, He even gave me

brain cells, where I should have come undone, Yes I found a true faithful friend in God Above, His love Won!”

Charles Spurgeon wrote:
“It is always unpleasant when reading an interesting article in a magazine to find yourself pulled up short with the ominous words, “To be continued.” Yet they are words of good cheer if applied to other matters. What a comfort to remember that

the Lord's mercy and loving kindnesses are to be continued.

Much as we have experienced in the long years of our pilgrimage, we have by no means outlived eternal love. Providential goodness is an endless chain, a stream which follows the pilgrim, a wheel perpetually revolving, a star forever shining and leading us to the place where He is, who was once a babe in

Bethlehem. All the volumes that record the doings of divine grace, are but part of a series to be continued.”

Yes, God is faithful. In fact, God tries our faith that we may try his faithfulness.

For us, to be full of faith is to ‘have’ faith and perhaps lots of it. For us to be faithful is to ‘keep’ the faith. It is being true to the trust placed in us by others and by God.

Faith is a subject that pervades the bible. It is found in the Old Testament, in the Gospels, in Acts, in the Epistles and in John's writings.

We often have difficulties with the abstract and philosophical nature of faith. Some of the other fruit of the Spirit are a bit easier – possibly because we can sense when they are absent as well as when they are present:

We can often sense when
love is expressed and know
pretty clearly when it is not.

We comprehend joy

We can appreciate peace
and identify it

We do understand patience

We can identify kindness

We may have some
difficulties with goodness –
particularly if our judgement
is tainted

We know gentleness and

We appreciate self-control

But faith is internal. If we are talking about faith in God then it is between us and God. For many, what we call faith is wishful thinking or hope. It tends to be belief in a single human dimension – the mind.

When God talks about faith – He does so in several dimensions. This is the true nature of faith. God sees faith

as total commitment – not an intellectual exercise.

Faith is of the mind, but it is also of the will and the emotions. It is because of this totality that true faith is by necessity is a fruit of the Spirit. A life lived in the Spirit will bear faith and that faith will be demonstrated in our understanding, in what we do, and in what we feel.

In the Old Testament,
God's faithfulness and

covenant love are closely related

For example, Deuteronomy 7:9 says, ‘Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.’

In the New Testament, God also acts in faithfulness:

He provides for both good

and evil people (Matt 5:45)

He rewards those who do his good will (Matt 6: 4, 6, 18)

He provides a way out for believers in the midst of temptation (1 Cor 10:13)

He remains faithful as he fulfils his promises (2 Cor 1:18-19)

He remains faithful even in our faithlessness (2 Tim 2:13)

Christians, like the Israelites, are to respond to God in faithfulness (1 Cor 4:2)

Sam Varner is the former strength and conditioning coach of the Clemson University Football Team and trainer for seven Olympic medallists including Picabo Street and Tommy Moe. He left training and for two years wrote the book “Slimmer, Younger, Stronger.” As a

Christian, he shares his faith and talks about how prayer is important to having a healthy life.

In 1998, after many rejections from book publishers, his literary agent finally called.

“I’ve got great news for you,” Varner’s agent said, “A major publisher wants to buy your manuscript!” That was good news. Varner had already exhausted his savings

during the two years it took him to write the book. He was ready to cash a pay check. “There’s only one catch,” the agent continued, “they want you to take out all the Christian stuff from the book.”

Sam Varner was serious about his faith in Christ and editing the “Christian stuff” from the book would compromise what he believed.

Varner said “No thank you” to the publisher and turned down the money they were ready to send him. He lost the book deal, but he kept his integrity and knew that the God that gave him the passion to preach his message of good health would provide a publisher for him.

“After 25 publisher rejections and what seemed like an eternity, I was beginning to wonder if I had

made the right decision.”

Varner commented, “But I continued to pray and entrust my book with God.”

In May, 1999, Varner’s agent called him again.

Another publisher wanted to publish his book just as it was and make it their lead book for the year. It sold 10,000 copies in the first six weeks of publication and Sam negotiated a second book deal with the publisher.

“Looking back now,”
Varner said, “I know that God
had better plans for my book.
I just simply needed to trust
him and have faith.”

A college student walked
into a photography studio
with a framed picture of his
girlfriend. He wanted the
picture duplicated. This
involved removing it from the
frame. In doing this, the
studio owner noticed the
inscription on the back of the

photograph: “My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity.” It was signed “Diane,” and it contained a P.S.: “If we ever break up, I want this picture back.”

So, how do we grow in our faithfulness?

A shepherd once came to the city of Edinburgh from the country. He had his small

obedient dog with him.

While there, the man died and was buried. That little dog lay upon its master's grave-not for a day, a week, or a month, but for 12 years.

Every day at one o'clock a gun was fired in the castle of Edinburgh. When the gun was fired the dog would run to the local baker who gave it food and water. Then back to the grave it would go.

This continued till the dog died 12 years later. That was faithfulness!

A man threw a goose, which had been run over and crushed by a car, into an oil drum. For seven years the gander, that goose's mate, never went more than ten feet away from that oil drum. That was faithfulness!

George Mueller prayed for 52 years for a certain man to come to Christ.

A pastor visited an elderly man 21 times before being admitted into the house, but then he befriended the man and led him to Christ. That was faithfulness!

A Welsh postman had the British Empire Medal conferred upon him by Queen Elizabeth; he had not missed a day's service in 43 years.

Paul Dhrlick, the chemist, performed 605 unsuccessful experiments; the 606th was a

success!

Thomas Edison made 18,000 experiments before he perfected the arc light. After experiencing 50 failures on another project he said, “I have found 50 ways it cannot be done!” That was faithfulness!

During the Korean War a man, rather than betray his buddies and surrender to the enemy, buried himself for eight days and nights in the

muck and mud of a pig-sty
(except for his nose and
mouth so he could breathe).
That was faithfulness!

We can grow in our
faithfulness by having a
personal relationship with
Christ. If we are truly faithful
to Him and obey His
commands, this will be
evident in our lives.

My challenge to you is
this: Think about the ways
you show your faithfulness to

God. Are there things that are getting in the way of your faithfulness? What areas of your life have you not given over to Him? Through spending time in prayer, ask God to make these things clear to you, so that He can grow you in your faithfulness.

Matthew 25:21 has recorded these words of comfort to those who are faithful: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”.

I'm not sure who wrote the following observation on this text, but I found it quite by accident on a scrap of paper while tidying up a box of papers I had stored for later reading.

A railway gatekeeper, who one cold night required every passenger to show his ticket before passing through to the train, and was rewarded with considerable grumbling and protesting, was told: "You are

a very unpopular man tonight.” “I only care to be popular with one man,” was the reply, “and that is the superintendent.”

He might have pleased the passengers, disobeyed orders, and lost his position. He was too wise for that; his business was to please one man-the man who hired him, gave him his orders, and rewarded him for faithfulness, and who would discharge him for

disobedience.

The servant of Christ has many opportunities to make himself unpopular. There are multitudes who would be glad to have him relax the strictness of his rules. If he is their servant, they demand that he should consult their wishes. But if he serves them, he cannot serve the Lord. “No man can serve two masters.”

He who tries to be popular with the world, will lose his

popularity with the Lord. He will make friends, but he will lose the one Friend who is above all others. He will win plaudits, but he will not hear the gracious words: “Well done!”

Finally I would like to close with a simple poem, ‘The Old Soldier: Faithful unto Death’ by Terry Joe Kee

God called for a soldier to
come join in the fight,
To fight in day’s heat and

darkness of night.

One entered the battle and
joined in the fray,

Satan already was working
to make him his prey.

But this one had listened
and armed himself well,

He knew that the battle
meant heaven or hell.

A helmet of salvation he
placed on his head,

Loins girt with truth as the
Captain had said.

A breastplate of
righteousness covered his
chest,

“Be ready” we’re told,
“Satan comes with his best.”

The gospel of peace helps
prepare a man’s feet,

And a shield of faith when
fiery darts we meet.

Finally, the Lord places a
weapon in hand,

It’s one you will need when
making your stand.

It’s the sword of the Spirit

and it's given to you,

It's mighty, it's strong, and
always it's true.

The soldier had fought in
the heat of the day,

And others he won who
now walk in the way.

Sons he converted and a
daughter or two,

A wife stands beside him,
and he's working on you.

He fights and he fights and
he never does quit,

When the Captain returns
he must find him fit.

He's fighting for a city
which can't be found here,
A city where God, Christ,
and the Spirit are near.

Satan keeps fighting, but
this is one he can't win.

This soldier knows where
he's going, knows where he's
been.

Behind him there's
suffering, pain and a loss,
But before him a crown,

the prize of the cross.

Satan strikes him with
sickness, wounds, and
disease,

But all is lifted when he
falls to his knees.

Life's taken its toll, on a
bed he's now lying,

Sadness for some, this
soldier's now dying.

Satan's final weapon you
now find him wielding,

The final enemy, death,

and no choice but yielding.

Human eyes clouded with
tears that make dim,

But his spiritual eyes are
still clearly on Him.

The end is in sight, but
here is the goal:

His name is recorded on
the heavenly roll.

He's fought the good fight,
the course he's finished,

The faith he has kept, his
hasn't diminished.

The body is laid and will
soon turn to dust,

The spirit's secure says
One who is just.

The graves will open and
dead shall be raised,

Forever the righteous are
gathered in praise.

The soldier's armour
beside him is laid,

Not needed in the land
where roses ne'er fade.

So why should we be so
sad and forlorn,

Faithful unto death, we'll
see him again.

Prayer: Thank you Father that you have demonstrated faithfulness in all your dealings with us.

Please give us the Spirit's gift that we may be faithful to You, to others and also faithful to the cause that you have called and entrusted us.

And may the blessing of God the Father, of Jesus the son and of the Holy Spirit be upon us now to keep us faithful and true until you

**come to take us home, we
pray in Jesus' name, Amen.**



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The fruit of the Spirit is Meekness

The cartoonist Johns in a 'Lea' cartoon has the main character saying, "My sermon today is on humility, and in my opinion, it's one of the finest pieces ever written."

Romans 12:3 reminds me that I cannot say that. "For by

the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

Let me read our Key passage once more. Galatians 5:22, 23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,

temperance: against such
there is no law.

In his book ‘The Winner Within’, Pat Riley, former basketball coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, talks about the danger of what Riley calls ‘the Disease of Me’.

He tells how the Laker’s out-of-control egos brought about one of the quickest falls in the history of the NBA.

They had won the

Championship in 1980. The following season they were predicted to do it again. Then, resentment set in among the players. Some thought Earvin Johnson got too much attention from the media. Kareem Abdul Jabbar believed that he was being snubbed by other players.

Some players believed they weren't getting the recognition they deserved. As a result, the Lakers shifted

their focus from winning to whining. And they got beaten in the first playoff round. This is the ultimate humiliation for a reigning champ; it had happened only twice before in NBA history.

Riley summed it up by saying, “The Disease of Me leads to the Defeat of Us.”

Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. Open your Bibles, please at Matthew 11:28.

Matthew 11:28 reads,
“Come unto me, all ye that
labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest. Take
my yoke upon you, and learn
of me; for I am meek and
lowly in heart: and ye shall
find rest unto your souls. For
my yoke is easy, and my
burden is light.”

The New International
Version says, “for I am gentle
and humble in heart” The
word the NIV translates as

“gentle” is translated as “meek” in other Bibles. This is the same root word in Greek, *praios*, as we find in Galatians 5:23 that says that the Fruit of the Spirit is meekness.

Now you might be thinking, Wait a minute, isn't there a separate Spiritual fruit of gentleness? Correct, however when Galatians 5:22 says that the Fruit of the Spirit is gentleness, it uses the

Greek word *chrestotes*
meaning usefulness, kindness
and excellent moral character.

Today we're focussing on
meekness with its synonym
humility, the opposite of
Satan's first sin.

Humility. The word itself
comes from '*humus*' the Latin
word for soil, compost or
earth, and in the end simply
means that I allow myself to
be earthed in the truth that
lets God be God, and myself

his creature. If I hold on to this it helps prevent me from putting myself at the centre, and instead allows me to put God and other people at the centre. This is what it means to be humble.

There is a vast difference between being humble and being humbled. To be humbled is when I am suddenly made low.

In consequence of being humbled, Adam and Eve hid

themselves, Peter wept bitterly and Judas hanged himself.

A pastor was asked to speak for a certain charitable organization. After the meeting the program chairman handed the pastor a cheque.”

Oh, I couldn’t take this,” the pastor said with some embarrassment.” I appreciate the honour of being asked to speak. You have better uses

for this money. You apply it to one of those uses.”

The program chairman asked, “Well, do you mind if we put it into our Special Fund?” The pastor replied, “Of course not. What is the special fund for?” The chairman answered, “It’s so we can get a better speaker next year.

Humility is like an undergarment that ought to be worn but ought never to be

seen.

D L Moody wrote, “A man can counterfeit love, he can counterfeit faith, he can counterfeit hope and all the other graces, but it is very difficult to counterfeit humility”.

Elsewhere, Moody wrote, “Moses spent forty years in the king’s palace thinking that he was somebody; then he lived forty years in the wilderness finding out that

without God he was a nobody; finally he spent forty more years discovering how a nobody with God can be a somebody. When Moses and the people found out they were nobodies without the resource of God, that's when the Exodus began".

H A Ironside, a minister in the early part of the 20th century, knew he was becoming prideful. His church was doing well. His

messages were being received enthusiastically. People recognized him on the street. He realized he needed to do something to humble himself. He asked, “What can I do that will curtail my ego?”

He concluded that it would be healthy if he rented himself out to a vendor and carried a sandwich board advertisement for an entire day. So for 8 hours Ironside walked the streets of Chicago

carrying a promotion for a local business on his back.

As he prepared for bed that night he thought to himself, “What a humbling experience that was!”

However, he confesses that in the next second he mused, “You know, I’ll bet there’s not another preacher in Chicago who would be willing to do what I did today!”

Humility is an elusive

virtue. Once you think you've got it, you have probably lost it.

One preacher reported, "I have a great sermon on humility but we've never had a big enough crowd to merit preaching it!"

Meekness is indeed a fruit.

A Brahmin compared a certain Christian missionary to the mango tree. All its branches hang with fruit. It is

then assailed with stones and clubs by passers-by. How does it respond?

By dropping fruit with every blow at the feet of those who assail it. At the close of the season, it stands scarred and battered, its leaves torn off, its branches broken. But the next year it bears more fruit than the previous year.

That is what our meekness should do in the world. Not try to conserve its self-esteem

but bear fruit -- fruit that descends low at the attack of cruel words and actions.

Humility is a rare virtue. The world doesn't consider humility of value and few Christians pray earnestly for it. But the apostle Paul wrote, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (2 Corinthians 11:30).

Paul had reason to boast from a human perspective. He

had received the best Jewish education. He was a Roman citizen. He had a keen mind. He was known by thousands. He had travelled all over the world. He was a prolific writer. He'd experienced a special call from God.

No wonder Paul had to struggle with ego on occasions. But God humbled him at his conversion by striking him blind for three days. Shortly after his

conversion Paul was humbled again when he was lowered in a basket from a window in the city wall to escape those who wanted to arrest & execute him.

Throughout his ministry Paul was arrested, beaten, imprisoned, criticized, mocked, stoned, and left for dead, but since God had revealed so much to him, he was still tempted by pride. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:7

that this was, in his words, (quote) “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me”. The Lord helped Paul remain humble throughout his ministry because “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Peter Marshall’s prayer in

front of the US Congress was,
“Lord, when we are wrong,
make us willing to change.
And when we are right, make
us easy to live with”.

Pastor Robert R. Kopp in
an article entitled, *‘All I Want
for Christmas’* tells an
interesting parable. He says:
When Walter started working
for the largest corporation in
the world, the personnel
director said he would have to
start at the bottom and work

his way up. So Walter found himself in the basement of the corporation's headquarters building in the mailroom doing the most humble work. Walter liked his job, but often day-dreamed about what it would be like to be a junior executive, vice president, president, or even chairman of the board.

One day, as Walter was busy collating the mail, he heard tiny footsteps in the

corner and noticed a small cockroach creeping around. Just as he was about to step on it, he heard a small voice scream: "Don't kill me! Please, don't kill me! I'm Milton the cockroach. And if you spare my life, I promise to grant all of your wishes."

Bear with me as we remember that this is only a parable.

That sounded like a pretty good deal to Walter. So he

spared Milton the cockroach's life.

Walter's first wish was to get out of the mailroom and be a junior executive. Milton granted that wish. Next Walter wanted to become one of the vice presidents of the corporation. That wish was granted too.

As a matter of fairy tale fact, Milton the cockroach kept granting every one of Walter's wishes until Walter

was finally elevated to be chairman of the board, on the top floor of the headquarters building in the largest corporation in the world.

Now everybody looked up to Walter and he was very happy. Ever so often, Milton the cockroach could hear Walter saying to himself: "I am Walter. Everybody respects me. Everybody knows I'm in control. I'm at the top. No one is bigger or

better or more important than me."

One day as Walter was sitting behind his desk and daydreaming about how important he had become, he heard footsteps on top of the roof. When the sound of the footsteps suddenly stopped, Walter decided to investigate. What he found was a little boy who was on his knees praying.

By this time, as you can

imagine, Walter had become quite impressed with himself and his position as chairman of the board of the largest corporation in the world. So he asked the boy, "Are you praying to Walter?"

"Of course not," said the little boy with a smile of innocence. "I'm praying to God!"

Walter responded, "Why are you praying to God? I'm chairman of the board of the

largest corporation in the world. What can God do for you that I cannot do for you?" The little boy replied, "God made me and God saved me."

Walter didn't know what to say. Very disturbed by this turn of events, he sent for Milton the cockroach as soon as he got back to his office on the top floor of the headquarters building of the largest corporation in the world.

"I want to be like God,"
Walter told Milton.

So Milton the cockroach
granted Walter's wish and
Walter arrived back to the
mailroom in the basement as
the most humble of
employees.

Back in the fourth century,
Augustine of Hippo wrote
about the meekness of God
becoming a baby with these

words:

“[God is] maker of the sun,
[yet] He is made under the
sun.

In the Father he remains,
[yet] From his mother he goes
forth.

Creator of heaven and
earth, [yet] He was born on
earth under heaven.

Unspeakably wise, [yet]
He is wisely speechless.

Filling the world, [yet] He
lies in a manger.

Ruler of the stars, [yet] He

nurses at his mother's bosom.

He is both great in the nature of God, and small in the form of a servant”.

C H Spurgeon was no doubt familiar with these words because in a sermon in his New Park Street Pulpit, he said of God, “Infinite, and an infant. Eternal, and yet born of a woman. Almighty, and yet hanging on a woman's breast. Supporting a universe, and yet needing to be carried

in a mother's arms. King of angels, and yet the reputed son of Joseph. Heir of all things, and yet the carpenter's despised son”.

A. W. Tozer in *‘The Pursuit of God’* wrote, “The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather, he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself.

He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is, in the sight of God, more important than angels. . . . He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring.”

We need not be concerned what people will think of us,

as this fruit of the spirit will humble a person without degrading him and the Grace of God will exalt him without inflating him.

Open your Bible please at
Psalms 37:11

Psalms 37:11 says, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace”.

Men cannot understand

how meekness is going to inherit the earth. Men believe in physical strength. They believe in arms and armies. They believe in craft and cunning. They believe in energy, will, and perseverance. They believe in things. They believe in matter. They believe in influencing their fellowmen, working upon them by threats, by pain, by fear.

There are few men who

believe that a humble man is being used in the strongest possible manner. They cannot credit that his humility shows that he is governed by his highest nature. They cannot conceive that an attitude of meekness is in perfect accord with the divine nature, which is dwelling in that meek one as a result of his new birth in Christ.

In saying that the meek shall inherit the earth, the

Psalmist declares this is the potential accomplishment of the man who is indwelt by the Spirit of God within man.

Open your Bible again, this time at Matthew 5:5. to the commencement of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:5 says,
“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”.

A missionary in Jamaica was once questioning some

little boys on the meaning of this beatitude and asked, “Who are the meek?” A boy answered, “Those who give soft answers to rough questions.” We shall do well to remember this child’s definition. The one who has wisdom in his head and heart does not need to shout at others. Wisdom speaks softly and persuasively, instead of impelling and forcing. Through the use of our tongues people will know

whether we are wise or not.

One night during an evangelistic meeting, a paralytic was wheeled down the aisle and placed near the platform.

In the preliminary part of the service, the song leader caught sight of him and asked, "What is your favourite hymn?" He immediately answered, "Count Your Blessings!"

There was no wail of complaint from the handicapped man, just a vivid sense of the goodness of God. Our submissiveness to God spells satisfaction for our lot on earth.

This is the lesson of this Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." This paralytic is surely heir to a greater part of earth than many a millionaire.

Meekness, in this sense, is

a power, the power to feel satisfaction with what God gives, the power not to merely endure it but to enjoy it to the fullest and to use it for His purpose.

Some years ago, a party of Americans were leaving Cairo, Egypt, on a journey across the desert and bought vessels in which to carry water. Each one chose the kind of vessel that pleased him. One found jars of brass

whose fine designs attracted him. Another purchased porcelain vessels of rare beauty. A third, however, took some plain earthenware bottles.

The way across the desert was long and wearisome. The heat was intense. Every drop of water was of value. The brass vessels heated; the water became impure, unfit to drink. The costly porcelain jars cracked in the heat and

the water was lost. But the plain earthenware bottles kept the water pure and fresh to the journey's end.

Nicolaus Copernicus was a famed astronomer born in Poland on February 19, 1473. He was a mathematician whose accomplishments changed men's ideas of the universe. Also he was a well-known writer. Although highly educated in

astronomical science, he was much more – he was a child of God who had learned to know and trust his Saviour, Jesus Christ.

When he was critically ill with his final illness, his book, ‘On Resolutions of the Celestial Bodies’, just off the press, was laid in his arms. At the close of his life, he did not think of himself as an astronomer or scientist, but as a sinner who needed the

forgiveness of his Saviour.

He asked that the following epitaph be written on his gravestone: “Lord, I do not ask the kindness Thou didst show to Peter. I do not dare ask the grace Thou didst grant to Paul; but, Lord, the mercy Thou didst show to the dying robber, that mercy show to me. [For] that earnestly I pray.”

Humility is an essential virtue.

Humility is not insecurity, cowardice, or self-consciousness.

Humility simply reflects a constant awareness of the need for God in our life.

Humility says, “Regardless of my title or influence, I am still a sinner in need of God’s grace. In spite of my gifts I know that without God, I am nothing.”

Humility means we are

willing to take a back seat in order to advance the cause of Christ. It means we're not easily offended if we're not in the limelight or asked to sing the solo, give the keynote speech, or be the chairman.

Humility means if we succeed and all the charts in our business trend upward, we don't become proud or boastful.

We just thank God that he's gifted us and enabled us to

prosper. It means that if we are failing, if our life is falling apart, we don't quit, wallow in self-pity, or blame other people.

We don't complain that we deserve better. We just say, "Lord, by your strength, we're going to continue on."

When Sammy Morris, a Kru boy from Africa, went to America to be trained for Christian service, he presented himself for

matriculation at Taylor University. He revealed a spirit all too rare among Christians. When the President of the University asked him what room he wanted, Sammy replied, "If there is a room nobody wants, give that to me."

Of this incident the President later wrote: "I turned away, for my eyes were full of tears. I was asking myself whether I was

willing to take what nobody else wanted. In my experience as a teacher, I have had occasion to assign rooms to more than a thousand students. Most of them were noble, Christian young ladies and gentlemen; but Sammy Morris was the only one of them who ever said, ‘If there is a room that nobody wants, give that to me.’“

Such humility is the absolute ceasing to fight for

our agenda and believing that God will fight on our behalf for His.

In the horse and buggy days, a man was driving with his wife along a dangerous road. At a very narrow place the wife became frightened and seized the rein nearest to her.

Her husband quietly passed her the other rein and let go. Then, more frightened than ever, she said, "Oh, don't you

let go!” He answered, “Two people cannot drive one and the same horse; either I must drive or you must.” Then she gave him the reins and he drove safely past the danger.

Humility isn't thinking less of ourselves, it's just thinking of ourselves less. And I guess I should add, thinking of Jesus Christ more.

During construction of Emerson Hall at Harvard University, president Charles

Eliot invited psychologist and philosopher William James to suggest a suitable inscription for the stone lintel over the doors of the new home of the philosophy department.

After some reflection, James sent Eliot a line from the Greek philosopher Protagoras: “Man is the measure of all things.”

James never heard back from Eliot, so his curiosity was piqued when he spotted

artisans working on a scaffold hidden by a canvas. One morning the scaffold and canvas were gone.

The inscription? “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” Eliot had replaced James’s suggestion with words from the Psalmist.

Between these two lines lies the great distance between the God-centred and the human-centred points of view.

God uses broken things. It takes a broken cocoon to produce a butterfly. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, a broken egg to release a hatchling, broken clouds to produce rain, broken grain to give bread and broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is the broken Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever.

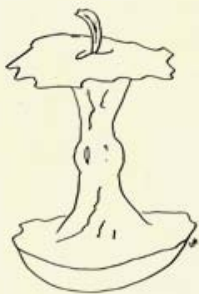
Through this fruit of the
Spirit may we be both humble
and mighty in the sight of
God.

Prayer: “Our Father, which art in Heaven, Thank you for the gift on humility and meekness.

We acknowledge that knowing You makes us humble and knowing ourselves keeps us humble. Create in us the fruit of a humble and contrite spirit and empower us to be bold for You and Your Kingdom’s sake.

We thank You for this blessing in the name of the

Loving Lord, the Gracious Father and the Fruit-giving Spirit, Amen”



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The fruit of the Spirit is Self Control

The Fruit of the Spirit is self-control. When I began preparing this homily as a part of our series on the fruit of the Spirit, one text troubled me. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27 "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I

have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified"

I was talking with my wife Rosemary this past week regarding today's homily and I made reference to an anecdote by Laura Smith.

Laura's young daughter was learning the fruit of the Spirit in Sunday School, so Laura asked her to recite them to her.

The daughter replied,
'Love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, and
remote control.'

Now we may giggle at this
but without the remote control
of the Spirit of God (maybe
call it 'other-control') we
would have a hard time
practicing self-control.

Unlike a DVD or video
remote control, the remote
control of the Spirit has no re-

wind nor erase button to undo the past, nor a fast-forward button to know what tomorrow may bring, but it does have a pause and stop button to help us to say 'no' when we need to.

Though listed last by Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23, "self-control" (sometimes translated "temperance") is surely not the least of the fruit of the Spirit. It could easily have been first, because it

plays a major role in the maturing of other spiritual fruit. It might be said that self-control is the glue that holds all the other qualities together.

Like other fruit of the Spirit, self-control is a gift of grace. It has been called "disciplined grace". Grace because it is free, and disciplined because there is something for us to do.

An author whose books I

find inspiring wrote in *The Desire of Ages*, page 301, “The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character.

Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection

with the courts above.”

Self-control may sound negative, but it is an integral part of grace itself. If we don't control ourselves—our feelings, our appetites, our drives—then they control us.

Thus, it's either self-control under the grace and power of the Holy Spirit or it's being controlled by someone or something else. Ultimately, we decide.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen said that self-discipline never means giving up anything, for giving up is a loss. Our Lord did not ask us to give up the things of earth, but to exchange them for better things.

While working at Christchurch Public Hospital I had occasion to visit the mortuary during an autopsy. The attendant was apologising for the smell that

emanated from an open bottle that he was carrying. He explained that it contained alcohol, a chemical that preserves the dead but kills the living.

Ann Landers in a syndicated column wrote, “Alcohol is a product of amazing versatility. It will remove stains from designer clothes. It will also remove the clothes off your back. If it is used in sufficient quantity,

alcohol will remove furniture from the home, rugs from the floor, food from the table, lining from the stomach, vision from the eyes and judgment from the mind.

Alcohol will remove good reputations, good jobs, good friends, happiness from children's hearts, sanity, freedom, spouses, relationships, Man's ability to adjust and live with his fellow man, and even life itself. As a remover of things, alcohol has

no equal”.

Self-control is exchanging harmful things for better things.

While working in a psychiatric hospital in New Zealand I was responsible for co-ordinating *Alcoholics Anonymous* meetings for recovering alcoholics.

Because I had never personally experienced alcohol use or abuse I found it

a challenge identifying personally with the attendees' addictions.

One recovering alcoholic sensed this and he handed me a hand-written scrap of paper with these words on it: "We drank for happiness and became unhappy. We drank for joy and became miserable. We drank for sociability and became argumentative. We drank for sophistication and became obnoxious. We drank

for friendship and made
enemies. We drank for sleep
and awakened without rest.
We drank for strength and felt
weak. We drank with the
excuse that it was medicinal
and acquired health problems.
We drank for relaxation and
got the shakes. We drank for
bravery and became afraid.
We drank for confidence and
became doubtful. We drank
to make conversation easier
and slurred our speech. We
drank to feel heavenly and

ended up feeling like hell. We drank to forget and were forever haunted. We drank for freedom and became slaves. We drank to erase problems and saw them multiply. We drank to cope with life and invited death."

In his book, '*End of the World Man*', Paul Ricchiati tells us that [during the 1870s Temperance Rallies] crowds were held spellbound and would arise [as one] to sign

the temperance pledge. The people were thoroughly sold on temperance, however, they did not stop their drinking.

People who smoke or drink pay for their indulgence twice: once when they get the tobacco or the bottle and then again when the tobacco or the bottle get them.

A philosophical comedian, the late Spike Milligan, described a cigarette as a stick with a fire at one end and a

fool at the other.

Harry Emerson Fosdick made this observation: “No horse gets anywhere until he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunnelled. No life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated, disciplined.”

Open your Bible please at
Philippians 2:12 a passage

known by theologians as The Paradox of Self-Control -

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

The paradox being that we must have self-control but, in reality, God has control for us and in us as verse 13 promises, "For it is God which worketh in you both to

will and to do of his good pleasure." You see, we can't do it without the Holy Spirit's power.

I need to remind myself often that self-control is not something that can be done by myself alone. We cannot, as Carlyle said, slackly wander into the kingdom of Heaven.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

I remember reading of a young man in great distress about his spiritual state who went to see a pastor.

He said to the pastor, "Sir, can you tell me what I must do to find peace?"

The pastor replied, "Young man, you are too late."

"Oh!" said the young man, "you don't mean to say I am too late to be saved?"

"Oh, no," was the reply,

"but you are too late to do anything. Jesus did everything that needed to be done twenty centuries ago."

Synonyms for self-control include self-discipline, strength of mind, and willpower. This fruit of the Spirit extends far beyond simply restraining Christians from doing what's prohibited but includes enabling us to do what's good.

There are obviously dos

and don'ts in the Christian life. There is a constant struggle with self, with the flesh, with the ways of the world.

Paul shares this dilemma in Romans 7:15-18, when he talks about the struggle between what he knows he should do and what he's tempted to do. However, in Romans 8:1 ... please look at it with me.

In Romans 8:1 Paul gives

us the answer.

Romans 8:1 promises,
"There is therefore now no
condemnation to those who
are in Christ Jesus, who do
not walk according to the
flesh, but according to the
Spirit" Whenever in Scripture
you see the word 'therefore'
ask yourself what it is there
for?

Paul is talking about
walking in the Spirit. A life
without the Spirit is incapable

on its own of developing the fruit of the Spirit. Though we have the will, Paul speaks for all of us when he says that we don't have the power. The answer to the dilemma of Romans 7 is not when can we overcome but how. And the how is found through faith in Jesus.

We give ourselves to Jesus, we claim His righteousness, we are no longer condemned, and we surrender ourselves to

Him. We choose to walk in the Spirit, choose to follow His will, claiming His promises of victory. The key is holding onto the promises; here's where the power comes from.

We cannot do it alone. We have to make the conscious choice to overcome in His name.

The struggle is as much vertical (reaching up in faith) as it is horizontal (battling the

clamours of the flesh). We need to do both.

Betrayed by his own family, sold into slavery, Joseph had very good reasons to doubt the love and care (even the existence) of the God that he had been taught about since childhood.

However, that's not what he did. In Genesis 39 we find the key to why Joseph acted as he did?

Read with me Genesis 39,
beginning at verse 7.

Genesis 39:7-20 - "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. 8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; 9 There is none greater in this house

than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? 10 And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

Verse 11 And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was

none of the men of the house there within. 12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. 13 And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, 14 That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with

me, and I cried with a loud voice: 15 And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. 16 And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.

Verse 17 And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: 18 And it

came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out. 19 And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison."

How was Joseph
"rewarded" for his refusal to
yield to temptation? He was
falsely accused and thrown
into prison. Is that what he
gets for being faithful?

This is an important point
to remember. Can we expect
that our determination to do
what is right, no matter the
cost, will mean that things
will turn out okay for us in
the short term? What about
folk who have lost their jobs,

their spouses, their families,
indeed, even their lives
because they refused to
compromise with sin?

We have examples of this
in the Bible, and perhaps you
know people who have gone
through something similar.
Or, perhaps, you have gone
through it yourself. In the
end, suppose Joseph had
spent the rest of his life
rotting in jail? Had he still
done the right thing?

I started my homily today sharing a troubling verse. Let's look at it in context:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 -

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as

uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27
But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Notice how much in this Paul talks about himself and his struggles. We should find comfort in seeing that even a faithful Christian like Paul, one of the true giants of faith, had to struggle with self, with

sin, with the flesh. We are not alone in our battle. Heaven is going to be filled with people who knew the clamours of the flesh.

He picks up this same theme in Philippians 3:12 "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me"

Paul had a goal and he

stayed focussed on that goal.

Story time: The snow covered the ground, and three young boys were playing in it. A man said to them, "Would you like to try to race, with the promise of a prize for the winner?"

The boys agreed, and the man told them that his race was to be different. "I will go to the other side of the field," he said, "and when I give you the signal, you will start to

run. The one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner."

As the race commenced, the first boy began looking at his feet to see if his steps were straight.

The second lad kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing

But the third boy just ran on with his eyes fixed on the man on the other side of the

field.

The third boy was the winner, for his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him.

Here are some things to think about: Paul's goal was heaven – an eternal life and death issue was at stake. How confident was Paul regarding the race he was in? Where did his confidence come from? Why should we have the

same confidence?

Though Paul shows confidence, he's also aware of the possibility of failure. He describes it as being cast away or some translations say that he would be ineligible for the prize.

His solution is to bring his body into subjection – in other words to practice self-control.

Hebrews 12:1 tells us how

to grow in self-control -

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,"

Paul here again uses the race analogy that we shared earlier. Maybe you can think of some of the "weights" that you find are holding you

back. There may be a wrong way to do the right thing, but never a right way to do a wrong thing. No one has the right to do as he pleases unless he pleases to do right thing.

Every skill has to be practiced. Even though it is a fruit of Spirit-living, self-control doesn't come in a day. It comes in hits and misses, in successes and failures, as we try to practice it day after day.

We are most in danger of failure when we put ourselves in places where our weaknesses will be tested, where our most-difficult-to-control drives will be out on the firing line of temptation.

All of us have some areas of our life where self-control is lacking. It is sometimes easier to get victory over eating a second helping of a sweet dessert than to get victory over, for example, a

spirit of bitterness and
resentment.

G. Gordon Liddy was one
of the infamous Watergate
conspirators, a scandal that
rocked the United States in
the 1970s.

Liddy ended up serving
more jail time than anyone
else in this disgrace.

One time, when trying to
recruit a young woman for
criminal activity, Liddy

invited her to a restaurant. During the discussion, she asked how she could trust him; that is, suppose he were caught, how could she know that he would not turn her in?

In order to prove to her his self-control, Liddy placed his finger over a lit candle at the table, and held it there long enough for his flesh to start burning before he removed it.

His point was to show her just how much self-control he

had. No, Liddy, that wasn't self-control, that was self-delusion.

When it comes to self-control we are often our worst enemy. When Abraham Lincoln was candidate for the presidency, someone asked him what he thought of the prospect of being president.

With characteristic humour he answered, "I do not fear Breckinridge, for he is of the South, and the North will not

support him; I do not much fear Douglas, for the South is against him. But there is a man named Lincoln I see in the papers of whom I am very much afraid. If I am defeated, it will be by that man.

D. L. Moody confessed, “I have more trouble with D. L. Moody than with any other man I ever met.”

Another writer said that if we kicked the one who causes us most of our troubles, we

would not be able to sit down for weeks.

No wonder we need the Holy Spirit's Power. The Living Bible paraphrase of Romans 8:9 reads, "You are controlled by your new nature if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And remember that if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ living in him, he is not a Christian at all".

Finally, in closing here are five ways to grow this fruit

and maintain self-control.

Number 1. Ask God to give us the ability to keep our cool if someone is making it hot for us. If God controls the inner man, the world cannot control the outer man.

Number 2. Identify and lay aside any weight of sin that is likely to overwhelm us.

Number 3. Shun circumstances and places that will weaken our resolve. Keep

your head and heart going in the right direction and you'll not have to worry about your feet.

Number 4. Be willing to change, remembering that rubbers or erasers are not only for mistakes, but for those willing to correct their mistakes. Most people would like to change their circumstances, but not themselves.

And finally number 5.

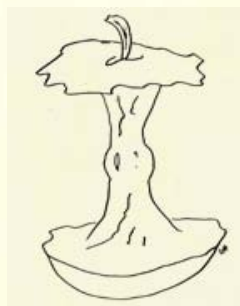
Daily seek to be filled with
the Holy Spirit so that all of
the fruit of our lives is
delectable and worth sharing.

Prayer: To be happy in Jesus, yes we must obey, but before that we must trust. Right now we can trust that your Holy Spirit can produce in our lives a fruit that we cannot produce on our own.

Grant us, Lord, your power to control our passions and desires to fit in with Your wonderful plans for our lives.

Please help us to be good masters of ourselves that we

**may be good servants to
others. In Jesus' Name,
Amen.**



The fruit of the Spirit is Applied

Today is the conclusion of a nine-month investigation into the Fruit of the Spirit, and we are talking today about its application.

Spiritual gifts and Spiritual fruit are not the same thing. The New Testament speaks of

spiritual gifts in the plural. The nine gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. On the other hand, the New Testament speaks of spiritual fruit in the singular. There is a difference in kind between Spiritual gifts and Spiritual fruit.

This may be illustrated by comparing a Christmas tree with an apple tree. A Christmas tree carries gifts. Each gift is attached to it by a

single act of a giver and received from it by a single act of the receiver. No time or effort is required of the person receiving the gift.

On the other hand, there is both time and hard work required to cultivate a fruitful apple tree. For it to produce an abundance of fruit, it must go through a series of stages that takes several years.

First, the seed must be placed in soil that by labour

has been prepared to receive it. From this seed a root goes down into the soil and at the same time a sprout rises upward.

During this time the orchardist nurtures the seedling and works to encourage its growth and protect it from pests and disease. Over a period of years the sprout grows into a tree. In due course blossoms appear on the tree. Then these

fall off and fruit begins to develop.

But if the tree is to become strong, the blossoms or the young fruit must be plucked off in the first years so that the tree's root system will develop to support a strong tree. Several years must pass before the apples are ready to eat.

In Leviticus 19:23 and 24 we are told not to eat the fruit in the first four years and

verse 25 says, "And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof".

At various stages in its growth an apple tree is very fragile. Strong winds may uproot the young tree, or at a later stage frost may destroy either the blossoms or the fruit.

In this process seed and fruit are inseparably linked to

each other. Fruit must grow from a seed, but on the other hand it takes fruit to produce further seeds. At the beginning of creation God ordained that every "fruit tree should yield fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself" (Genesis 1:12).

This establishes an important spiritual principle that is the focus of today's homily: Christians who do not bear spiritual fruit in their

own lives have no seeds to sow into the lives of others.

Open your Bibles please at the Gospel of John, chapter 15. Bookmark this passage as we will return to it often today.

John 15:1-8, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring

forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me".

Verse 5, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not

in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples".

Not far north of where we lived for many years in Cooranbong in the southern

Hunter Valley were over 150 vineyards. Suppose you were to take a trip back in time to the 1830s and enter the northern Hunter Valley region of New South Wales.

Now suppose you were to observe the vinedressers as they prepared the land for the planting of the vineyards: First would come the backbreaking work of ridding the land of stones. Then would come the task of

building rows of trellis and the planting of the choicest vines.

Then would follow the months and even years of careful irrigation and cultivation. Suppose that you were able to observe all of this painstaking labour as it took place over the months and even the years.

Suppose further that you were now to inquire of the owner of the land, "Sir, why

are you doing all this work?
What do you hope to gain
from your labour?"

Astounded by our failure to
grasp the obvious, he would
answer with one word,
"Fruit!"

The vinedresser undertakes
the hard work of preparing
the land and the painstaking
work of cultivating the vines
for one reason: to gain a
harvest of fruit.

Using the illustration of the vineyard, Jesus in this passage in John 15 informs us that the development of spiritual fruit is an essential part of the Christian life. Therefore we must see to it that we are, indeed, producing such fruit in our lives.

In verse one our Lord Jesus Christ compares Himself to the grapevines that flourished in Israel, declaring, "I am the True Vine." What is He

saying? What does He mean? In the Old Testament, the vine is a symbol of Israel; the people whom the Lord planted in the Promised Land of Canaan.

Consider Psalms 80:8-11, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered

with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river".

The vine, then, is a symbol of Israel, the people whom the Lord expected would bear fruit. But to the Lord's dismay and disappointment, the vine that He had planted in the land of Canaan did not bear good fruit; on the contrary, it produced 'bitter fruit and wild

grapes'.

Isaiah 5:2 says, "And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes".

God looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Isaiah 5:7, "For the vineyard of the Lord of

hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry [of distress]".

With this Old Testament background in mind, the Lord Jesus declares, "I am the True Vine." He is the only one who is always and forever faithful to Father God, the only one who bears good and pure fruit. Contrast the life of Jesus

with the testimony of
Jeremiah 2:21, a passage in
which the Lord is addressing
Israel: "Yet I had planted thee
a noble vine, wholly a right
seed: how then art thou turned
into the degenerate plant of a
strange vine unto me?"

In these verses, the Lord is
also speaking to you and me.
If you have not yet made a
one-hundred-percent
commitment to Christ and
would like to do so, please

come and see me personally afterwards and I will support you, guide you and pray with you.

Having identified Himself as "the True Vine," in John 15:1, Jesus now identifies all those who bear His name and have a connection with Him as being "the branches" (vs. 5.) He emphasizes that the branches attached to the vine are expected to bear fruit-the production of fruit is

mentioned six times in these eight verses, being summed up in verse 8, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples".

What is the "fruit" of which Jesus speaks? What is the fruit that God, the divine Vinedresser, demands? A certain church's Fundamental number 19 includes these words, "Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its

fruitage is obedience...".

Philippians 1:11 defines this spiritual fruit as "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God".

That is to say, the living of a truly Christlike life, the life of righteousness. That passage also indicates that this fruit is produced through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[As those who have been following this series of sermons will testify,] Galatians 5:22 & 23 defines this spiritual fruit as the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Now it is interesting to note that John 14:26, in one verse, mentions all three members of the Godhead, The Holy Spirit, the Father, and Jesus who was speaking those words.

If fact this verse is so

important, we ought to look it up together.

John 14:26, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you".

The expression used in the original language for the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit is the Greek couplet '*hagios*

pneuma' meaning [the] sacred breath.

After the Crusades, Western Europe received a number of supposed holy relics, including a tooth of Goliath, a tip of the devil's tail, and a bottle that held the breath of Christ. Of course, most of us here would not take such relics seriously.

If we did have the breath of Christ in a bottle, what would it mean?

Nothing. It is the spiritual presence of Christ, that is the Holy Spirit, in the life of a believer that counts.

John 14:26 then tells us how we get Spiritual fruit. The Holy Spirit who planted the seed, works to grow this fruit in us as He continually teaches us and daily reminds us to live out the fruit.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:32 and 33, "And whosoever speaketh a word

against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit".

Back to John 15:5, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I

in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

In his 1904 book, *'Quiet Talks on Prayer'*, Samuel Dickey Gordon wrote of John 15:5, saying, "That word 'abide' is a strong word. It does not mean to leave your [calling] cards; nor to hire a night's lodging; nor to pitch a tent, or run up a miner's shanty, or a lumberman's shack. It means moving in to

stay".

There was an old German schoolmaster who had carved over the door of his humble village home, "Dante, Molière, and Goethe live here."

Of course, the schoolmaster lived alone and had never even met those men of renown.

But he had so studied their lives and emulated them that

he could say they lived with him. In that sense, and in a finer sense, we can say that Jesus Christ abides with us.

According to John 15:16, this spiritual fruit, the fruit of righteousness, may be used by God to produce the fruit of bringing others to Christ: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain".

James Stalker, in his book *'The Four Men'*, wrote, "Some years ago, during a widespread revival of religion, a friend of mine, a minister in Edinburgh, was visited by a young engineer belonging to his congregation, who informed him that he had come to a religious decision [to become a Christian]."

"My friend asked him how it had come about? Had he

been attending the revival meetings? No. Had he been impressed in church? No. Had any companion been talking to him about the subject? No. How was it then?

It was the way in which the foreman of the place in which he was employed did his work. He knew the foreman to be a Christian; and he wished to be a Christian of the same type".

This, indeed, is the fruit

that God, the divine Vinedresser, requires: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" John 15:2.

Notice that in this verse Jesus speaks of some branches that are 'in me', but which do not bear fruit. In the case of such people there is only an informal connection

to Christ; perhaps by means of baptism, church membership, or even an intellectual understanding and acceptance of the doctrines about Christ. But there is no living, spiritual connection with Christ. There has been no entrance of Christ into the life; there is no experience of having the life of Christ in them; there has been no surrender of the life to Christ and no submission to Christ.

In this context we must soberly take to heart the part of the verse that says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" The reason for this is expressed in a more accurate translation of Jeremiah 5:10, "Go through her vineyards and ravage them, but do not destroy them completely. Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to the Lord".

These words were spoken

of that large body of Old Testament Israel that professed to know the Lord but in whose lives no spiritual fruit was to be found.

Roy Hession wrote,
"Victorious living and effective soul-winning service are not the product of our better selves and hard endeavours, but are simply the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are not called upon to produce the fruit, but simply

to bear it".

God expects us not only to bear fruit, but as John 15 verse 8 says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear 'much' fruit". This happens when we yield ourselves to the Vinedresser's pruning.

James Smith wrote, "Every blossom does not ripen into fruit. An abundance of blossom does not always result in abundance of fruit, but a scanty blossom is sure

to prove a scanty harvest. So there may be much [witnessing] and little fruit, but where much fruit is found there is always much [done for God]".

Again from verse 2 of John 15, "every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth [or prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit".

Urban T. Holmes III wrote, "Any good gardener knows that beautiful [healthy plants]

require careful pruning.

Pieces of a living plant have to die. It cannot just grow wild. We cannot simply 'celebrate growth'.

It is more than to be regretted, it is tragic that we seem to have lost the insight that growth in Christ requires careful pruning. ... We are not cutting away a cancerous growth, but making room for [more] intended growth".

God the Father, as the divine Vinedresser, carries out this work of pruning by means of a variety of measures involving various forms of trial and affliction. Divinely appointed affliction can serve the purpose of "straightening" a wayward branch:

Turn with me to Psalm 119. Look with me at verse 67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept

thy word".

And now verse 71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes".

And verse 75, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me".

In verse 3 of John 15, Jesus speaks a word of assurance to His disciples and to each of

His fruit-bearing branches:
"Now ye are clean through
the word which I have spoken
unto you." The same Greek
word (katharos) is used in
both verse two where it is
rendered, to prune or purge
and in verse three where it is
rendered with its usual
meaning, to wash or to be or
make clean.

When I was preparing this
homily, I earnestly prayed for
a cleansing of my heart so

that my presentation would not suggest in any way how good I may be (which is obviously debatable) but that you, my hearers, would sense how good God is.

In verse 3 our Lord Jesus is assuring us that the Father's work of pruning, a work that involves the use of affliction and trial, is not some kind of probationary testing, which, if successfully passed, grants a person admission into the

Vine. The heavenly Father, as the divine Vinedresser, does not select tender young seedlings that appear to have spiritual potential, subject them to a period of probationary testing, and if they pass the test, He grafts them into the Vine, accepting them as a living part of the Vine.

On the contrary, the heavenly Father, as the divine Vinedresser, prunes fruit-

bearing “branches” precisely because they are in living union with His Son, Jesus the True Vine.

Open your Bibles at Hebrews 12, starting at verse 5. Hebrews 12:5.

Hebrews 12:5-11 "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of

him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye [illegitimate], and not sons."

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which

corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them

which are exercised thereby".

It is important to understand that this pruning, which is another way of speaking about disciplining or training by means of discipline, is something the heavenly Father administers to those who are fruit-bearing branches attached to Christ, the True Vine, in a living relationship.

It is for the purpose of causing such branches to bear

more fruit, that is to say,
causing His children to
become more like His own
Son, Jesus.

And finally, Jesus instructs
us as Christians to continue in
a living relationship with
Him: John 15:4, "Abide in
me, and I in you. As the
branch cannot bear fruit of
itself, except it abide in the
vine; no more can ye, except
ye abide in me". We cultivate
our relationship with Christ

through the study and practice of His Word. Compare John 15:4, with John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Corrie ten Boom wrote, "If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost".

The hymn writer, W D Longstaff, exhorts us, "Take time to be holy, speak oft with

thy Lord; abide in him
always, and feed on his word"
(Hymn 500).

Jesus informs us that our
continuing relationship with
Him is the true and only
source of fruitfulness: The
branch cannot bear fruit by
itself, it must remain in the
vine.

It is my earnest prayer that
we will bear the fruit of the
Spirit and remain connected
to the vine not just for our

sustenance but so that we
would be a blessing to others.

Let's close now with a plea
for God's blessing on our
fruitfulness with hymn words:
'Dismiss Us Lord, With
Blessing, We Pray'.

Dismiss Us Lord, With
Blessing, We Pray

"Dismiss us, Lord, with
blessing, we pray;

As from Thy worship we
go our ways;

Guide in life's conflicts, all

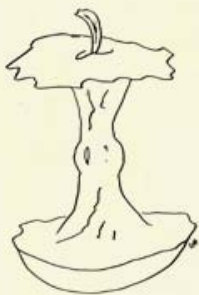
through the day;
Save in Thy kingdom,
Thine be the praise. Amen."

Prayer: May the Lord bless you, and keep you: May the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you.

May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

May you be touched with grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, from His comforting Spirit, and from the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

**May the peace of God,
which surpasses all
understanding, keep your
hearts and minds serene
through the merciful touch
of Christ Jesus our Lord
and Redeemer. Amen**



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Suggested Hymns

Love

Breathe on Me, Breath of God
Love Divine
At First I Prayed for Light

Joy

Blessed Assurance
To God Be the Glory
Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee

Peace

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms
It Is Well with My Soul
There is Sunshine in My Soul Today

Longsuffering

Not I, but Christ
Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour
Have Thine Own Way, Lord

Gentleness

Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild
I Would Be Like Jesus
Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead us

Goodness

God's Free Mercy Streameth
Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine!
Be Still My Soul

Faithfulness

O for a Faith
Great is thy Faithfulness
O Brother, Be Faithful

Meekness

Not I, But Christ
Have Thine Own Way, Lord
Just as I Am.

Self Control

Happy the Home
In Our Work and in Our Play
Trust and Obey

The Fruit of the Spirit in Your Life and Mine (Application)

Open My Eyes That I May See
O for a Closer Walk with God
Dismiss Us Lord, With Blessing We
Pray

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